

Attn: Board of Education
Vancouver School Board
School District #39
1580 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6J 5K8

Dear Trustees,

First, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to you for bringing to the forefront the issue of discrimination and violence against transgender youth in your district. This is a serious issue that often goes unaddressed in schools. Your initiative to update your important 2004 policy to explicitly include transgender and gender variant youth should be applauded.

Several years ago I was part of an initiative to travel around British Columbia to discuss the issue of protection policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity called the Purple Letter Campaign. We were proud to receive your Board of Education's unanimous endorsement for our initiative. During this campaign I had the opportunity to hear and read stories from hundreds of British Columbians about the need to see sexual minority and gender variant youth reflected clearly in policies; currently many youth feel isolated and left out of these policies and, by extension, their school communities. Through this campaign I had a chance to hear about the lived experiences of people across this province and realize the difficulties and challenges that people face; including in Vancouver.

More recently, studies have been done around the existing policies in British Columbia that have shown the impact they have on youth. The amount of discrimination and violence faced by youth in districts with explicit policies is much less, and their confidence and feelings of safety are greatly increased. The suicide rates in those districts with clear, explicit policies drop dramatically not only for LGBTQ+ youth, but for heterosexual youth as well. The tragic reality is that in British Columbia only half of the districts have these policies, and the province has a number of suicides a year that could potentially be prevented by demonstrating that students are welcome, protected, and celebrated in their schools. I cannot think of any parent, teacher, or fellow student that would endorse the continuation of preventable deaths of children in British Columbia.

I realize that creating and implementing a policy like this takes a considerable amount of courage and conviction. The moment one says the word "transgender" there is a lot of misinformation, prejudice, and assumptions made about what a policy will entail. That is why it is important to remember to keep at the centre of this discussion the people who will be most affected by this policy: transgender youth. Transgender people have very little representation worldwide, and especially at the policy-making level. Especially at a public consultation with people fundamentally against their very existence, it is difficult to make oneself heard. Please remember throughout this all that the lives of children and youth in your district are at stake, and that they are the stakeholders where this policy is concerned.

I also encourage you to pass this policy as quickly as possible, so that students can begin their school year in September secure in the knowledge that their human dignity is protected and respected in the policies and practices of the Vancouver School Board. As I mentioned, this will take courage and conviction, but I have faith that you understand the importance of the policy that you are implementing as well as the positive impact it will have on your students and school communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ryan Clayton
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University of Victoria