



May 8, 2014

Committee III - Education & Student Services
Vancouver School Board
1580 W Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 1W6

Dear Committee Member,

Our City of Colours would like to lend its support to the Vancouver School Board's (VSB) revised policy ACB and regulations ACB R-1 for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities. Our organization seeks to increase the visibility of, and address the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer people in various linguistic and cultural communities. Over the past few years, we have worked with the Vancouver School Board in distributing multilingual posters featuring people from the LGBTQ+ community, including a poster that gives voice to a racialized Chinese trans woman. As such, we applaud VSB's desire to bring greater awareness and inclusivity for trans* people in their revised ACB policy and ACB R-1 regulations. We expect this will reduce the level of isolation experienced by racialized people who do not conform to the norms of cisgendered, heterosexist, patriarchal and Eurocentric ideas around gender and sexuality. It will also help promote welcoming and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ people in the school community and actively educate students about important social issues.

This is a much needed update to the 2004 policy ACB as the revised policy and regulations seeks to fully include trans* people by mentioning transphobia and dedicating an entire section on supporting trans* people. It is important to note that the 2004 policy frequently mentions homophobia but does not refer to transphobia. Although homophobia is connected to transphobia (e.g., homophobic bullying can be related to people acting in non-gender conforming ways), transphobia can occur due to the intersection of multiple factors and identities that specifically relate to people who identify as trans* and/or gender variant. According to a 2011 report on LGBT students in Canada¹, schools with anti-homophobia policies did not lead to significant feelings of safety in relation to gender identity and gender expression. The authors suggest that there must be an intentional effort to address gender identity, gender expression, and anti-transphobia to create a more inclusive space.

¹ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.



The report also found that almost three quarters of trans* youth report experiencing verbal harassment and over a third of trans* youth experience physical harassment based on their gender expression. In addition, about 90% of trans* youth hear transphobic comments on a daily or weekly basis. Transphobia is closely linked to how sex and gender has been primarily viewed by Eurocentric societies as fixed binaries as opposed to differing perspectives in other cultures. The effects of transphobia are further exasperated for youth of colour who also experience the intersection of their race and culture on top of their sexual orientation, gender expression, and/or gender identities.

This means that transphobia cannot simply be seen as a medical and/or legal issue as it is deeply rooted in historical injustice and cultural insensitivity. By encouraging medical and legal professionals to judge trans* people, it dismisses the lived experiences of trans* people and ignores the social and historical forces that underlie transphobia. The discrimination and hardships faced by many trans* youth is influenced by various factors that go beyond medical diagnosis and by treating gender identity and gender expression as disorders, it actually contributes to the problem. Simply relying on medical professionals to diagnose others can be harmful, as indicated by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) listing homosexuality as a mental disorder up until 1973. However, in 2008, the APA publicly announced their full support in eliminating discrimination against trans* and gender variant people, and encouraging research on gender expression and gender identity².

VSB's proposal to explicitly support trans* people is a critical step towards creating more welcoming and inclusive school environments. Our City of Colours strongly encourage staff, students, and parents to embrace the proposed policy changes in establishing and maintaining a safe, inclusive, equitable, and welcoming learning and working environment.

Sincerely,

Simon Lam
Chair
Our City of Colours

² American Psychiatric Association. (2008). Resolution on transgender and gender identity and gender expression non-discrimination. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/chapter-12b.aspx#transgender>.