



Guidelines for Attending to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

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Introduction

The Waldorf Education Society of Edmonton and the Waldorf Independent School of Edmonton are responsible for cultivating a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe school environment. It is important to affirm and celebrate all students and provide them with opportunities to thrive in life and learning. The Values Statement and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement for the WISE are the foundation on which our work rests:

WISE Values Statement

We value children and honour the whole child.

We value Waldorf Education for what it brings to each family.

We value our unique community built on mutual respect and integrity.

We believe that humanity is interconnected and that it is our shared responsibility to participate in the healing and nurturing of our world.

We value the spiritual intention guiding our school, and we honour the diverse beliefs of our community.

WISE Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

We strive to foster a community that upholds the rights, safety, and well-being of all staff and students. We recognize individual, institutional, and systemic biases against gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, mental health, and socioeconomic status exist and believe every student and staff member has the right to a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe work and learning environment.

There is a wide range of diversity among our students, employees, and families. Fostering an inclusive school community that recognizes the range of uniqueness of our students is central to our work. All individuals in our community have the right to be open about who they are, including expressing their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in an environment that is safe and values diversity. These guidelines are primarily intended to address the unique needs of gender and sexual minority students.

The WISE exists within a broader context of laws and public policies that protect human rights. [The Alberta Education Act](#), the [Alberta Teacher Code of Professional Conduct](#), the [AWSNA Member Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), [AWSNA's Statement of Equality](#), and the [Alberta Human Rights Act](#) all serve as important policies and legislation that reflect the need for WISE employees to act in ways that are inclusive and respectful of students, their families, and school personnel with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. These laws and public policies are critical in guiding our work and ensuring that we attend to the rights of all of our students, families, and staff members.

Purpose and Application of Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to create welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe environments for all students, families, and school staff. Although many aspects of these guidelines influence all three of these groups, the primary focus of these guidelines is to address how we might best support students while honouring the pluralism and diversity within our school community.

These guidelines were developed to support clarity, provide assurance, and work coherently alongside the school's anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies, which are in line with our commitment to WISE Values and our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement.

Each student's needs and concerns are considered individually, therefore decisions related to supporting students are made on a case-by-case basis. Not all requests are accommodated in the same way, as many factors contribute to the collaborative decision-making process. When the unique needs of individual students are considered, it is possible to provide accommodations through a respectful and affirming process.

The guidelines set out in this document are intended to support best practices and decision-making related to sexual and gender minority students. This work intends to support members of our school's community in our shared obligation to attend to the equality and dignity of all individuals, inclusive of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

Safety

In order for students to fully participate in school life, the WISE has the responsibility to ensure that our school is safe and inclusive for all. This involves ensuring we thoughtfully examine and adopt universal strategies to promote positive, proactive behaviours with students, families, and staff. It also involves being explicit in our messaging that harassment and discrimination of any student, family member, or staff member for any reason, including their gender and sexual minority status, is never acceptable. If and when any harassment or bullying occurs, it will be dealt with in a timely and just manner in accordance with the WISE's [Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination](#) and [Sexual](#)

[Orientation and Gender Identity](#) policies.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Our school staff members are always encouraged to communicate openly with parents/guardians about the learning and well-being of their children. We believe learning and development are enhanced by parents/guardians and school staff communicating and working together. Whenever possible, ensuring home-school communication and wrap-around support in the interest of the child is our ideal endeavour.

Some transgender and gender non-conforming students are not open about their gender identity at school, at home, or in the community for a variety of reasons. Similarly, many students are not open about their sexual orientation. Given the sensitivity related to one's gender identity and sexual orientation, should a student disclose that they are a sexual or gender minority to a WISE staff member, the information will be held in confidence. Unless a student provides permission to share this information, or the staff member determines the student would be at risk of harm, the staff member will not disclose this information to anyone else, including other staff members or parents/guardians.

By far, the majority of WISE students who have made a disclosure to staff related to gender identity or sexual orientation have already had conversations with their parents/guardians. Many students, particularly if they are seeking accommodations such as name/pronoun changes, approach the school *with* their families to have these conversations.

When school staff members contact the parents/guardians of a transgender or gender non-conforming student, whenever possible, the student is to first be consulted, in private, about how they would like the school staff member to refer to them (name and pronouns).

Gender Diversity Overview

Gender identity is a personal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, neither, or something else. Everyone has a gender identity. Gender identity can also be fluid rather than static and change over time for some people.

Gender identity begins to develop during the preschool years. Most children identify with the sex assigned to their certificate of birth. Some young children, however, do not fully identify with the sex assigned at birth. Individuals who are insistent, consistent, and persistent in their statements about this are more likely to maintain a gender identity different from the sex assigned at birth as adults.

Biologically speaking, some people have sex variations that include chromosomal, hormonal, or

physiological characteristics that are comprised of both male and female categories (referred to as intersex people). As such, not all people are exclusively categorized as male or female due to variations in chromosomes, hormones, and physical anatomy.

Of our transgender and gender non-conforming students, many were assigned one sex at birth yet identify with another gender (for example, assigned male at birth, but identify as female). We also have students who identify as both genders, neither gender, or who experience a fluid and fluctuating gender – often referred to as non-binary identities.

Waldorf Education

Waldorf schools pursue their pedagogical tasks out of the spirit of human rights, thereby contributing to building a society founded upon mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation between all human beings. Waldorf schools do not select, stratify, or discriminate amongst their pupils, but consider all human beings to be free and equal in dignity and rights, independent of ethnicity, national or social origin, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political, or other convictions.¹

Waldorf education supports each child and young person to build healthy relationships with themselves, others, and the world. The WISE respects and allows individuals to take the lead with their identity. It is important that staff practice deep listening, giving students room to express themselves in ways that feel natural to them, including honouring gender identities shared by students and their families. Waldorf education supports students within the framework of its overall aims of enabling children and young people in their socialization, qualification, and individuation.

Socialization includes understanding, appreciating, and respecting differences among people related to their shape, size, and appearance, including, but not limited to, their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Through socialization, students learn to develop life-long resilience and habits that help regulate appropriate behaviour, creating healthy self-esteem. Teachers establish healthy classroom practices in which children learn to listen to each other, respect each other, and learn that helping each other is both expected and normal.

Qualification includes ways in which teachers bring materials to students that reflect the diverse world we live in. It provides students with the opportunity to understand a broad range of perspectives and reflect on their own experiences through the content. Story material is an important field in which social diversity is represented, including a balance of gender and cultural representation.

Individuation refers to the acceptance of our differences, and the importance of respecting one

¹ AWSNA's Statement of Equality. This declaration was made to unequivocally clarify the intents of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical theories and work and to explicitly reject allegations that Waldorf schools in any way espouses discriminatory views. (as authorized by the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education -ECSWE)

another. Students cultivate narrative empathy as they listen to another's life story. This process of narrative empathy not only fosters understanding but also encourages a sense of interconnectedness, paving the way for a more compassionate and inclusive society.²

Education Act Compliance and Parental Notification

Framework Under the Education Act

All teachers uphold their responsibility to legislation by respecting the rights of all students, parents, and guardians. In accordance with the Education Act, parents/guardians must be notified when “courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.” In addition, “this section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.” For additional details on explicit vs. implicit instruction, please see the Notification Requirements subsection below.

As mandated by the Alberta Education Program of Study, human sexuality education is offered to students in Grade 4 to Grade 9. Parents/guardians have the right to exempt their child from school instruction in human sexuality education and alternative supervision will be accommodated for those students who have been exempted.

Furthermore, it is not the prerogative of teachers or staff to impose conversations upon students, or to initiate discussions or questions related to the student's gender identity or sexual orientation. Instead, they respect the individuality and privacy of each student by refraining from raising questions or engaging in dialogues that pertain to the student without the student's own initiative. This approach ensures that students are in control of when and how they wish to address or discuss matters related to these topics, fostering an environment of respect and consideration for each student's personal boundaries.

Notification Requirements

Explicit instruction involves lessons, exercises, or instructional materials that directly focus on, and explicitly explore, religious beliefs, practices, doctrines, or human sexuality topics in detail. Explicit instruction leaves no ambiguity in its intent to address and provide specific information related to religion or human sexuality. For instructional materials, exercises, outcomes, or courses to be considered to deal explicitly with human sexuality or sexual orientation, there must be no question that the subject matter is intended to be about human sexuality or sexual orientation. At the WISE, SOGI-specific curriculum is not taught to students.

² Excerpts from “Learning about relationships. Sexuality, gender identity in Waldorf education: potential problems and possible solutions” Martyn Rawson (April 2021)

Implicit instruction does not require parental notification. The Education Act is clear that notification to parents is not required for indirect or incidental references to human sexuality or sexual orientation in an outcome, course, exercise, or instructional material. That is to say, when a reference to human sexuality or sexual orientation occurs indirectly, or in connection to another subject matter in classroom discussions, notification is not required. Therefore, teachers should not avoid topics where these subject matters may arise, nor should they feel the need to stop classroom discussion. Similarly, when a course of study or education program does not already deal primarily and explicitly with human sexuality, or sexual orientation, references to this subject matter in student projects or presentations would be considered incidental and a notification would not be required. With this in mind, WISE teachers are trusted to use their judgement to discern the inclusion, representation, and positive acknowledgement of diverse and pluralistic individuals. If students ask questions related to incidental material, teachers may provide brief answers which express the essence of the WISE values e.g. “Our school is a place where everyone belongs and we tell stories about all different types of people.” Teachers always strive to maintain class focus on the primary learning content.

Developmentally Appropriate Content and Inclusivity

In Waldorf education, teachers endeavour to provide age-appropriate instructional material across all subject areas. WISE teachers are trained educators who consistently discern how to bring content to students in a way that meets them developmentally. By tailoring the instructional approach based on the developmental stage of students, teachers can ensure that materials are introduced in an age-appropriate and meaningful manner. The fundamental principles of respect, empathy, and inclusivity remain constant, but the content and depth of engagement are adjusted to match the students' cognitive and emotional capacities at different stages of their education.

Some examples of how this may appear within a teaching context include:

1. **Inclusive storytelling:**

In junior high language arts, students might read a novel where characters from diverse backgrounds hold leadership positions. Teachers could guide discussions about the importance of proportional representation in literature and how the interactions between characters contribute to the themes of cooperation, understanding, and unity.

In lower elementary grades, teachers could tell a story that features two queens ruling over neighbouring kingdoms. The story could focus on their friendship, cooperation, and problem-solving skills as they work together to address challenges.

2. **Ecological diversity:**

In junior high science, students could delve deeper into the concept of behavioural adaptations in animals. Teachers might use the example of penguin dads to discuss how certain behaviours, such as sharing parenting duties, contribute to the survival and thriving of the species. This could lead to discussions about the ecological roles of different species and their impact on the environment.

In lower elementary grades, teachers might introduce the concept of animal parenting diversity. They could share a simple story about penguin dads and how they help take care of their chicks. The focus would be on showcasing the caring and protective nature of animal parents in different species.

3. Cultural exploration:

In junior high social studies, students could explore the concept of Two-Spirit individuals within the broader context of Indigenous history and contemporary society. Teachers might present a more nuanced discussion about how Two-Spirit people were traditionally recognized as having important roles in many Indigenous cultures and how their experiences have been impacted by colonization and ongoing social change.

In lower elementary grades, teachers might introduce traditional stories from Indigenous cultures that feature Two-Spirit characters. The stories could emphasize the unique roles and perspectives of these individuals within their communities, portraying them as respected and valued members who possess special qualities.

4. Proportional representation in mathematics:

In math, teachers could present word problems that involve groups of people with diverse attributes, such as different genders, ages, and backgrounds. These problems encourage students to engage with everyday situations while naturally including proportional representation of all human beings.

Accommodating Gender and Sexual Minority Students

There are several different types of accommodations that can be made for gender and sexual minority students including name and pronoun usage, gender identification, access to washrooms, participation on sports teams, etc. How a student identifies (gender, name, pronouns) and how they would like to be supported at school is unique to each student. Conversations with the student and the student's parents/guardians are critical in determining what the student and family desire and how the school might best address the student's needs.

Self-identification is the sole measure of an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Students or parents/guardians should not be asked to produce notes from psychologists, medical professionals or any other document. Each student's needs and concerns are considered

individually, therefore, each request is treated on a case-by-case basis. Not all requests are accommodated in the same way. Many factors contribute to making the best decisions and accommodations for a student. Teachers and, when needed, the Principal will assess each situation to make decisions in the best interests of the individual student at hand.

Initial Conversations and Collaborative Decision-Making

When a student or family member shares information about a particular student's gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, it is imperative that students and families feel respected, heard, and supported. An open and supportive conversation is the first step.

During the initial conversations with students or parents/guardians, it is important to recognize that school staff do not need to have all the answers or information in order to best support the needs of the student. The goal of initial conversations is to understand the experience of the student and their expressed hopes and needs so that the immediate needs of the student can be determined and addressed (e.g., access to a safe and comfortable washroom) followed by additional supports (community resources or administrative supports, etc.) and accommodations as needed.

It is very common for gender and sexual minority students to keep their gender identity and sexual orientation private for long periods of time prior to sharing with family, friends, and school personnel. It is also common for students to share information with one person or a very small group of people initially and to eventually share it with others. This timeframe can be either fairly condensed or very lengthy. The process differs for each individual and is based on many unique factors. As such, a student may be thought of, and be referred to, as male or female in a school for years while having an internal sense of having a different gender identity. While a disclosure about gender identity or sexual orientation may seem new to others, the student may have known about this aspect of their identity for a long time.

Our school staff members are always encouraged to work collaboratively with parents/guardians regarding the well-being of their children. When the student's wishes, and the wishes of their parent/guardian conflict, the Administrative team (specifically the Principal and/or Executive Administrator) is available for support and consultation.

Pronouns

Some students may want to use gender-specific pronouns (she/her or he/him), and others may want to use gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. they/them, etc.). Gender-neutral pronouns have been used for many years and are familiar to many of our students, families, and staff. It is advisable to avoid assuming which pronouns a student prefers to use.

Teachers at the WISE work to provide safe, welcoming, and caring classroom environments for all

students. This includes providing opportunities for students to share their pronouns if they choose to (e.g. during introduction circles, group activities, etc.). For example, during an introduction circle when students are asked to state their names, they may also be invited to share other important information about themselves, at their discretion, including, but not limited to, their pronouns, interests, hobbies, names of their pets, etc.

Calling a person by the incorrect pronoun is called misgendering. Staff, students, or community members may inadvertently use the incorrect pronoun. Typically the best way to handle this situation is to correct the pronoun (e.g. “Sorry, I meant they”) and move on, not drawing attention to the mistake. Similarly, if someone hears another student or adult misgendering someone, they can gently correct them without causing further embarrassment (e.g. “Actually, Sam uses the pronoun he”). Students may ask staff members to correct the pronoun usage of others, or they may want to handle the situation themselves. This may differ depending on whether or not they are present when the misgendering occurs or if they are absent (e.g., some students want to correct it themselves if they are present, but want someone to correct it if they are absent).

If a student and their parents/guardians disagree with the type of pronouns that the student is requesting staff to use, the class teacher(s), with the Administrative team, are available for consultation.

Adults and students purposefully misgendering anyone in our school community, by intentionally using the incorrect pronouns, is never acceptable. Unintentional but repeated misgendering is also harmful. If a student or staff member is concerned about being misgendered at school, they should contact the Administrative team for consultation and support in a timely manner.

Name Changes

It’s important to honour student requests regarding changing their name or pronouns in order for them to feel supported and accepted. Students may ask to be addressed by their chosen name and to choose pronouns that align with their gender identity and/or gender expression. A student does not have to obtain legal documentation of a name change or gender marker change (e.g. birth certificate) to be addressed by a chosen name or pronouns.

There are three primary ways in which a student’s name requests may be accommodated:

1. A student may request the everyday use of a chosen or preferred name. This includes school staff referring to a student by their chosen name. This does not include making any changes in the Provincial Approach to Student Information (PASI) system – it is simply the casual day-to-day use of a chosen name. When a student makes this request, they should be made aware that their legal name will continue to be displayed on class lists, report cards, and other documents. If a student and their parents/guardians have differences of opinion about

use of a chosen name, the Administration, with the class teacher, can be contacted for consultation.

2. A student may request that an Also Known As (AKA) name is entered into PASI. This involves parental knowledge and permission. School staff should always use an AKA name when addressing students, writing their names, discussing the student, and so on. Additionally, once the AKA name is entered into PASI it will be reflected on most school documents (e.g., student ID cards, class lists, etc.). However, some PASI reports automatically draw legal names, rather than AKA names, so it is important that schools review these reports to ensure students' legal names are not disclosed (e.g., verify class lists for substitute teachers, Individual Program Plans, etc.).

Disclosure of a student's legal name may have serious and significant consequences for a student and may "out" the student as transgender or gender non-conforming without their consent. Report cards can and should be printed using the AKA name. Students should be advised that a legal name change is required if they want their official Alberta Education documents to reflect their chosen name (e.g., transcripts, provincial assessments, etc.). Adding an AKA name does not change a student's legal name on their Official Student Record.

3. A student can also legally change their name. In order to change one's legal name individuals must follow the process as outlined by Alberta Vital Statistics. For students under the age of 18 who are not independent students, this requires written parental permission. If the parents/guardians provide the school with documentation from Alberta Vital Statistics of a legal name change then the school can change the legal name in the Official Student Record. The documentation from Alberta Vital Statistics should be kept in the Official Student Record. When a legal name change occurs, the student's new legal name will be reflected on all school documents, classroom materials, school ID cards, etc.

Changes in Gender Identification

There are a variety of ways individuals self-identify with regards to gender. For example, individuals may identify as binary (female or male), as non-binary (e.g. both male and female, neither, or in fluid ways that change over time), as a third gender, genderless, and so on. It is important not to make assumptions.

PASI currently has four gender options available to students – Female (F), Male (M), Unspecified (X), and Unknown (U). A student may have one of those four codes entered (it cannot be left blank). Gender identity is based solely on self-identification and does not require any official documentation (e.g. new birth certificate, letter from a psychologist or medical professional). A gender change in PASI does require parent/guardian permission unless the student is designated as

an independent student. If there is disagreement between the wishes of a student and their parents/guardians, please contact the Administrative team for consultation.

Currently in Alberta, birth certificates indicate a sex designation for all individuals (male, female, or X). For students born in Alberta, the parents/guardians can contact [Vital Statistics](#) to request a change to the sex designation on the student's birth certificate. Students and families may or may not choose to do this while the student is still in school. Individuals are not required to change their birth certificate to receive support and accommodations with respect to gender at the WISE or to have their gender marker changed in PASI.

Washrooms

Ensuring that students feel safe and secure at school requires the availability of inclusive washrooms. Students may access washrooms that are congruent with their gender identity. Access to safe and inclusive washrooms allows students to go freely about their day-to-day lives at school with their identities being honoured.

Some students may feel more comfortable using a private, gender neutral or universal washroom that is accessible to all students. The WISE has designated two single-stall washrooms for this purpose. These washrooms are labelled as "gender neutral" for added clarity and ease of access. The student determines if and when they would like to use a single stall rather than group washrooms.

It is advisable for teachers and staff to pay consideration to washroom access prior to embarking on field trips or school outings. Some students may feel comfortable using public washrooms that align with their gender identity. Some students, however, may not feel comfortable or safe with this option. Efforts should be made to research the availability of gender or universal washrooms at field trip destinations. A call ahead of time to request this information is very helpful. When staff make these arrangements it is important that they maintain the student's confidentiality by not disclosing information related to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation without the student's direct permission.

It is helpful to speak with the student and family regarding the washroom options available and to determine the student's needs and wishes in relation to facilities. The goals of the conversation are to maximize the student's social integration, ensure the student's safety and comfort, minimize stigmatization, and provide equal opportunity to participate fully in day-to-day school life, field trips, physical education, and sports.

The WISE Student Code of Conduct, the WISE Tiered Behaviour Strategies, and teacher supervision of students are in place to help ensure that all students are aware of the behavioural expectations in washrooms and that any form of intimidation, bullying, or harassment of students using a bathroom is not acceptable. Any personal or safety concerns about students using a group

washroom or changeroom would be discussed and dealt with on a case-by-case basis and reasonably accommodated where possible.

Physical Education and Sports

Part of healthy growth and development is being physically active and learning skills to live an active life. All students are encouraged to participate in regular physical education and games and movement classes.

Students also have full access to recreational or competitive athletic activities in accordance with their self-declared gender identity. This is fully supported by the [Alberta Schools' Athletic Association Policy Handbook](#).

Students may try out for, and be a part of, recreational and competitive teams that align with their gender identity. Extra care and attention should be paid to accommodating students on sports-related outings. For example, students should be asked about their preferences related to privacy regarding changing clothing at another school/location. It is important that these conversations take place well ahead of time to ensure details are looked after and the student feels supported. When staff make these arrangements it is important that they maintain the student's confidentiality by not disclosing information related to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation without the student's direct permission.

Minimizing Gender-Segregated Activities

In an effort to be inclusive of all gender identities and expressions, it is important to reduce all gender-segregated activities to the greatest extent possible. Doing so helps students of all ages express themselves as freely as possible and to learn, play, dress, and present themselves in ways that are congruent with their gender identities and gender expressions.

Best practices in this area include dividing students for games, competitions, assignments, and so on based on something other than gender (e.g. dividing students based on interests, counting off, left side of the room versus right side of the room, alphabetically, etc.).

Overnight Trips

The WISE provides a variety of overnight trips for students (e.g., camping, class traditions, cultural travelling experiences, etc.). The overnight sleeping accommodations for these trips vary greatly (e.g. campsites, barns, school gyms, etc.). During these overnight trips, the safety and supervision of students are the priority. This includes the overnight accommodations, which are chosen carefully based upon the inclusion of the entire class, so as to not segregate students based upon their gender

identity. When this is not possible, alternative sleeping arrangements are chosen carefully, based upon the needs and wishes of the students and their parents/guardians, the facilities where students will be sleeping, and the discretion of the teacher.

GSA (Gay-Straight Alliances)

The Purpose of GSAs

At the WISE, we have a vibrant array of clubs catering to diverse student interests. Students may, at any time, request an inclusivity club to support diverse needs within the school, including determining a reasonable name for these groups, such as GSA.

To ensure transparency and inclusivity, the establishment of GSAs follows the same protocol as other school clubs. All clubs are formed in accordance with Club Guidelines, contained in the Parent Handbook (see Appendix links). We announce the creation of the GSA to the student body through the same channels used for other club announcements, such as notices on bulletin boards or in classrooms. All clubs are operated within the scope of school values and norms.

GSAs are student-led clubs designed for gender and sexual minority students and allies (including cisgender and heterosexual students). Facilitated by dedicated teachers, the purpose of GSAs is to provide spaces in which LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and more) students and allies have a safe place to meet and connect. The clubs are open to all students and foster a sense of belonging and respect for diversity.

As stated above, students are invited to rename the group at their discretion, empowering them to take ownership and adapt the name to reflect their evolving experiences and personal journeys. This means that the name of the GSA may change from year to year, or even throughout the year.

At our school, we recognize the unique needs of different age groups. To cater to these diverse needs, we have two GSAs: a dedicated elementary GSA for students in grades 2-5; and a junior high GSA for students in grades 6-9. Each year, the formation of these groups depends on student interest and requests. If a student initiates the establishment of a GSA, in accordance with the Education Act, we are committed to providing them with the opportunity to start the corresponding group. For instance, if a grade 6 student expresses interest, we will initiate the junior high GSA. Similarly, if a grade 3 student requests it, we will start an elementary GSA. This ensures that our GSAs remain responsive and tailored to the specific needs and demographics of our student body.

GSA Facilitators

GSA facilitators focus on fostering connections, providing emotional support, and promoting understanding among peers. When a facilitator is appointed, they will receive focused administrative support to ensure they are apprised of their roles, responsibilities, and legislation to feel confident in their duty to provide a safe space.

Being a student-led group, GSA facilitators respond directly to reasonable requests from students. As such, GSA facilitators do not direct activities or field trips beyond offering a secure space for LGBTQ+ students and allies.

As per the guidelines outlined in the Education Act, it is important to note that explicit teaching of sexuality and distribution of related materials is not permitted within GSAs. Our focus is exclusively on providing a safe space for discussion and support, respecting the boundaries set by the education system. For more information on this topic, please see the section ‘Education Act Compliance and Parental Notification’ above.

Protections for Students Under the Education Act

The Education Act explicitly guarantees students the right to establish inclusion groups, including GSAs. If the school cannot find a staff liaison to facilitate the GSA, the school principal must inform both the board and the Minister, and then the Minister will appoint a responsible adult.

Schools are prohibited from disclosing a student's membership in any inclusion group. All school authorities, whether public or private, are obligated to adhere to relevant laws such as the [*Personal Information Protection Act*](#). The legislation ensures that children receive the necessary support they require. Under Alberta's privacy laws, disclosure of GSA membership would only be justified in cases where a student is at risk of harm.

Transparency and open communication are valued when it comes to GSAs at our school. We understand that parents may have questions or seek more information about what the GSA entails. In such cases, we actively encourage and welcome parents to reach out to the GSA facilitators and/or to the Administrative Team. We believe that fostering dialogue and providing clarity regarding the purpose and activities of GSAs is essential for students, parents, and staff. By maintaining transparency, we aim to create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone involved can feel informed and engaged.

Pride Flags

When students feel accepted and supported in their identities, including their sexual orientation and gender identity, they experience improved mental health outcomes, increased self-esteem, and a greater sense of belonging. Inclusive environments also contribute to reduced rates of bullying, discrimination, harassment, and self-harm. The WISE takes efforts to ensure our entire diverse student population feels accepted, seen, reflected, and represented meaningfully and proportionally in the school community. Compounding research³ indicates visual signals, such as pride flags, help students feel supported and welcome at school, and are most effective when they are placed in purposeful locations that indicate safe and supportive spaces. WISE teachers and office staff may

³ “Examining the Relationship Between LGBTQ-Supportive School Health Policies and Practices and Psychosocial Health Outcomes of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Students” Wojciech Kaczkowski, Jingjing Li, Adina C. Cooper, and Leah Robin. (Jan 2022)

display a small pride flag in their classroom or office. This ensures that students are able to discern which adult may be safe, skilled and/or supportive in their context.

This research also shows that promoting inclusive environments and identifying safe spaces benefit not only LGBTQ+ students, but heterosexual and cisgender students as well. By promoting respect for everyone, celebrating diversity and embracing differences, all students learn to appreciate and respect various identities, fostering empathy and understanding.

Pride flags may be displayed outside the classroom, e.g. in school hallways, in alignment with the school's guidelines on Visual Displays and Posters, as detailed in the Parent Handbook. For any materials being hung outside of individual classrooms or offices, the WISE follows an administrative approval process.

Student Attire

Students are free to dress and present themselves in a manner that reflects their gender identity, gender expression, personal taste, and comfort. Expectations related to student dress should not be gender specific (e.g., some students must wear skirts for a formal performance while others are allowed to wear dress pants). All students are expected to maintain standards related to appropriate attire and in alignment with the WISE Dress Guidelines, as found in the Parent Handbook.

Family Members

It is important that the family members of our students feel welcomed, respected, and valued in our school. We celebrate the full range of diversity of our family members including those who are sexual or gender minorities. One of the ways in which we can increase the likelihood of family members feeling included is through our use of language. School staff should be thoughtful when using terms like mother and father. For example, instead of saying to a class, "Boys and girls please take your pictures home to your mom and dad", teachers can say, "Everyone please take your pictures home to your family," or "Children, please take your pictures home to your parents or guardians". Inclusive language reflects the diversity of family life we know our students to have, as students may live with grandparents, step-parents, other family members, foster parents, etc.

Terms and Definitions

Note: Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are influenced by multiple personal, cultural, political, social, and economic factors. Terms and definitions related to these concepts are constantly changing and evolving. There are many different terms in use because individuals think about and experience their gender and sexual orientation in many ways. What follows is a list of common terms and definitions. However, it is in no way an exhaustive list and individuals may use a term that is not included here or may use one of these terms in a somewhat different way.

Ally

A person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, who supports and stands up for the human and civil rights of sexual and gender diverse individuals.

Binary

A cisgender or transgender individual whose gender identity is either male or female.

Non-Binary

Individuals who identify as non-binary identify as neither fully male nor female, and may identify as both, neither, a third gender, a fluid gender, or something else entirely.

Bisexual

An individual who is emotionally, sexually and/or physically attracted to both males and females.

Bullying

Bullying is when someone intentionally and repeatedly hurts, threatens, or picks on another person with the intention of causing harm. It involves a power imbalance, where the person being bullied is made to feel inferior and may have difficulty defending themselves or stopping the behaviour. Bullying can occur physically, verbally, or through the use of technology (cyberbullying), and it often causes emotional distress and can have long-lasting negative effects on the victim.

Cisgender

A term for people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender Identity

A personal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, neither or something else. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender Expression

How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behaviour (e.g., a person's name, clothing, hairstyle, body language, mannerisms, etc.).

Gender Fluid

A person who at any time identifies as male, female, neutral or any other non-binary identity or some combination of identities. Their gender identity can vary at random or in response to different circumstances (other terms include multi-gender, non-binary, transgender).

Gender Non-Conforming

A person whose behaviours or gender expression falls outside of what is generally considered typical for their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Queer

An umbrella term for those identifying with a gender that is not traditionally male or female.

Heterosexual

A person who is emotionally, sexually and/or physically attracted to someone of the opposite sex. Commonly referred to as “straight.”

Human Sexuality

Human sexuality refers to the diverse ways individuals experience, express, and engage in romantic, sexual, and emotional relationships and attractions with others.

Intersex

A person born with both male and female sex characteristics (e.g., chromosomes, hormones and/or physical anatomy).

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to a person's romantic, physical, and/or emotional attraction to others. It is distinct from gender identity, which relates to an individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. In simple terms, sexuality is about who someone is attracted to, while gender identity is about how someone identifies their own gender. Sexuality differs from Human Sexuality (as defined above).

Sexual Orientation

A person's romantic or sexual attraction to a specific gender or genders (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, pansexual). Sexual orientation and gender identity are separate, distinct parts of one's identity (e.g., one can be transgender and identify as gay, straight, bisexual, etc.).

Transgender or Trans

A person whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. This is often used as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity or gender expression does not fit into conventional expectations for males and females. We use the term transgender as an expansive and inclusive term in these guidelines to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Note that transgender does not have an “ed” at the end.

Appendix

[Education Act](#)

[Alberta Human Rights Act](#)

[WISE Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Teacher Code of Conduct](#)

[WESE/WISE Parents Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[WISE Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy, CC1505](#)

[Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Center: 12 Evidence-Based Facts](#)

[The Education Act GSAs & Inclusion Groups](#)

[WISE Parent Handbook](#)