



DRAFT TCDSB Equity and Inclusive Education Policy

- TCDSB’s Draft Policy Statement

‘We proclaim that every individual young or old is to be treated with reverence and that we are to see the face of Christ in every person.’ Statement from the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, January 14, 2011

The Toronto Catholic District School Board (the “Board”) recognizes that all people are deserving of dignity and are created equal in the image of God, each with inimitable characteristics (Genesis: 1:27). In accordance with the Catholic Faith and the Church’s moral teachings, the Board provides an educational environment which supports and embraces diversity within its Catholic community.

The Board recognizes that any form of social or cultural discrimination is incompatible with Catholic moral principles. The Board recognizes that the school system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, congruent and compatible with the protections entrenched in the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the “Code”), the *Constitution Act, 1982* and confirmed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The Board and its staff are committed to the elimination of discrimination as outlined in Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Ontario Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (2009) in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of the Board’s denominational rights under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and as recognized in section 19 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft Policy Statement:

Egale Canada is Canada’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) human rights organization: advancing equality, diversity, education, and justice. Through our Safe Schools Campaign, we are committed to supporting LGBTQ youth, youth perceived as LGBTQ, youth with LGBTQ parents, other family members, and friends as well as educators, librarians, guidance counsellors, education support workers, parents, and administrators and to helping make Canadian schools safer and more inclusive, respectful, and welcoming learning and working environments for all members of school communities.

According to Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011), “Generic safe school policies that do not include specific measures on homophobia are not effective in improving the school climate for LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students from schools with anti-homophobia policies reported significantly fewer incidents of physical and verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation.” As such, Egale urges the TCDSB to name the protected grounds of



discrimination explicitly when it mentions the Ontario *Human Rights Code* in its Policy Statement. Given the results and recommendations from the First National School Climate Survey Reports (see www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp for more information), this is an important consideration that needs to be addressed.

Further, *Every class in every school* notes that “LGBTQ students in schools with anti-homophobia policies did not report significantly higher levels of feeling safe at school with regard to gender identity and gender expression: this indicates a need to explicitly address gender identity, gender expression, and anti-transphobia in school and school board safer schools and equity and inclusive education policies.” In order to help ensure the safety, security, and dignity of trans youth as well as youth with trans parents and other family members who attend school in the TCDSB, Egale encourages the TCDSB to include “gender identity” and “gender expression” along with “sexual orientation” in its Policy Statement.



- Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices
1. Consistent with Catholic teachings and denominational rights the Board is committed to serving students, families and staff in its diverse Catholic community by incorporating the principles of equity and inclusive education in all aspects of its policies, programs, procedures and practices.
 5. The Board recognizes that the effective development, implementation and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies and practices require the involvement of all partners in the Catholic school community.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices:

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, one of the Guiding Principles to which boards must adhere in revising or developing their policies is “Equity and inclusive education is demonstrated throughout the system. The ministry, school boards, and schools will incorporate principles of equity and inclusive education throughout their policies, programs, and practices” (13).

Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011) recommends that “provincial Ministries of Education require the inclusion of anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, and anti-transphobia and intersectionality measures in safer schools policies and programmes, along with steps for the effective implementation of these policies, in order to provide support and motivation to district and school staff as well as a requirement that school divisions provide auditable evidence of meaningful implementation” (www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp).

As such, Egale applauds Ontario’s Ministry of Education for making the following statements in its Guidelines and the TCDSB for affirming them:

“In the course of its policy review cycle, a board is expected to embed the principles of equity and inclusive education in all its policies and practices and to integrate an equity and inclusive education focus into its way of doing business and all operations of its schools, including instructional practices...All the board’s policies, guidelines, programs, practices, and services should reflect the diverse viewpoints, needs, and aspirations of the broader community. Discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to equity and inclusive education should be identified and addressed so that students can see themselves represented in the curriculum, programs, culture, and teaching, administrative, and support staff of the school” (16).



- Shared and committed leadership
3. The Board is committed to an informed leadership philosophy that inspires, empowers, and supports all stakeholders in our Catholic community to join together to implement institutional practices and behaviours that cultivate equity and inclusion.
 4. The Board is committed to providing informed and shared leadership to improve student achievement, well-being and to close achievement gaps for students by identifying, addressing and removing all barriers and forms of discrimination in striving to achieve Catholic School Graduate Expectations.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft Shared and committed leadership:

Shared and Committed Leadership is both the first goal and a focus of Ontario’s Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (2009):

“The principle of shared and committed leadership recognizes that all partners in education—including community partners, parents, and students—are responsible for preparing students to live in a diverse society. However, bringing change to instructional practices and the learning culture requires strong, focused leadership from, in particular, school board trustees, directors of education, superintendents, principals, and teachers. Boards and schools are expected to provide leadership that is responsive to the diverse nature of Ontario’s communities and committed to identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to learning” (17).

According to Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011),

“Generic safe school policies that do not include specific measures on homophobia are not effective in improving the school climate for LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students from schools with anti-homophobia policies reported significantly fewer incidents of physical and verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation:

- 80% of LGBTQ students from schools with anti-homophobia policies reported never having been physically harassed versus only 67% of LGBTQ students from schools without anti-homophobia policies;
- 46% of LGBTQ students from schools with anti-homophobia policies reported never having been verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation versus 40% of LGBTQ students from schools without anti-homophobia policies.

LGBTQ students in schools with anti-homophobia policies did not report significantly higher levels of feeling safe at school with regard to gender identity and gender expression: this indicates a need to explicitly address gender identity, gender expression, and anti-transphobia in school and school board safer schools and equity and inclusive education policies.”



Consequently, *Every class in every school* recommends the following: “That school divisions develop anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, and anti-transphobia and intersectionality policies to provide institutional authority and leadership for schools” (www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp).

The national safer schools and inclusive education website, MyGSA.ca, has a space for sharing and reviewing school and school board policies pertaining to LGBTQ matters and anti-heterosexism, anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, and anti-transphobia. To find school board policies that explicitly address sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, visit <http://MyGSA.ca/SchoolBoardPolicies>.



- School-community relationships
7. The Board is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of our diverse Catholic community so that their perspectives and experiences are recognized.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft School-community relationships:

Egale would welcome the opportunity to partner with the TCDSB with respect to matters pertaining to LGBTQ-inclusive safe school environments.



- Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices
6. The Board recognizes the critical connection between Catholic student leadership and improved student achievement and will strive to include the student voice in all aspects of the implementation of equity and inclusive education.
 8. The Board is committed to implementing an inclusive curriculum based on Catholic values and to reviewing resources, instruction, assessment and evaluation practices in order to identify and address discriminatory biases so that students may maximize their learning potential.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices:

The Ministry’s document Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation states the following regarding inclusive curriculum:

“The ministry’s curriculum policy supports respect for and acceptance of diversity in Ontario’s schools. Through the curriculum review process, curriculum is continually revised to maintain and increase its relevance to the changing needs and lives of students...Schools are expected to give students and staff authentic and relevant opportunities to learn about diverse histories, cultures, and perspectives. Lessons, projects, and related resources should allow students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum (e.g.,...using texts written by gay/lesbian authors). Students need to feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning, supported by the teachers and staff from whom they are learning, and welcomed in the environment in which they are learning” (20-21).

Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices are also addressed in the Ministry’s Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools. In addition to reaffirming the above points made in the Guidelines, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 further states, “Students should be able to see themselves represented in the curriculum, programs, and culture of the school. Also, since schools have a pivotal role in developing the work force of tomorrow, students should be able to see themselves represented in the teaching, administrative, and support staff employed at the school.”

According to “Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia,” “Because it is generally understood that students enjoy a healthier, more respectful learning environment when they are included in the curriculum, most Canadian schools have taken measures to diversify many of their courses to include the ethnic and religious diversity of the students in their classrooms. Making the curriculum reflect the existence of LGBTQ students has been a much more contentious effort, and in the absence of mandate or even permission from principals and school districts to do so, most teachers hesitate to integrate LGBTQ content into their classes. Sadly, the



message to many LGBTQ students, explicit or implicit, is that other forms of diversity are respectable, but they and their issues are not fit for classroom discussion” (71). Even if LGBTQ students or staff members are not out at school, it does not mean that they are not there. It is possible that they simply are not comfortable being out there, and it is also possible that LGBTQ matters are important and relevant to students and staff members because they have LGBTQ parents or other family members or friends.

As such, Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011) recommends the following:

“That Ministries of Education and school divisions require the inclusion of respectful representations of LGBTQ people in courses and provide curriculum guidelines and resources for mainstreaming LGBTQ-inclusive teaching, including intersectionality, across the curriculum and auditable evidence of meaningful implementation” and that “schools implement LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in designated courses such as Family Life and Social Studies and provide teachers with resources for mainstreaming LGBTQ and intersectionality education in their own subject areas” (www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp).

Similarly to the point on a graph where lines cross being called a point of “intersection,” the fact that categories of identification—such as age, class, education, ethnic background, gender expression, gender identity, geographic origin, physical and mental ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other factors—are experienced simultaneously and cannot genuinely be separated from one another is referred to as “intersectionality.” Often, people are discriminated against with regard to multiple categories: for example, a racialized lesbian could be subjected to heterosexism, homophobia, lesbophobia, misogyny, racism, and transphobia or any other form of discrimination, such as ableism, ageism, and classism, depending on both how she identifies and how she is perceived to be. Further, each aspect of one’s identity can have an impact on other aspects. For example, a racialized lesbian may be exposed to different forms of sexism and homophobia from those experienced by a non-racialized lesbian.

Because discrimination can be based on multiple factors, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has begun taking a more contextualized approach, which it calls “an intersectional approach to discrimination.” For more information on this, see http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/DissIntersectionalityFtns/view.

Ontario’s Ministry of Education also recognizes the importance of approaching categories of identity as intersectional:

“Equity and inclusive education aims to understand, identify, address, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit students’ prospects for learning, growing, and fully contributing to society. Barriers may be related to gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, or other factors. It is now recognized that several factors may intersect to create additional barriers for some students.



These barriers and biases, whether overt or subtle, intentional or unintentional, need to be identified and addressed” (*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, 2009.)



- Religious accommodation Appendices A and B
9. The Board is committed to the values of freedom of religion and freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviour based on religion and will take all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodation within the legal rights afforded to the Catholic school system.



- School climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment
2. The Board recognizes the importance of anti-racism and anti-harassment policies in promoting and maintaining a Catholic learning and working environment that fosters racial and ethnocultural understanding.
10. The Board is committed to the principle that every person within the Catholic school community is entitled to a respectful, positive and Christ-centred school climate where the learning and working environment is free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft School climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment:

According to Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011),

- “70% of all participating students, LGBTQ and non- LGBTQ, reported hearing expressions such as ‘that’s so gay’ every day in school and almost half (48%) reported hearing remarks such as ‘faggot,’ ‘lezbo,’ and ‘dyke’ every day in school.
- Almost 10% of LGBTQ students reported having heard homophobic comments from teachers daily or weekly (17% of trans students; 10% of female sexual minority students; and 8% of male sexual minority students). Even more LGBTQ students reported that they had heard teachers use negative gender-related or transphobic comments daily or weekly: 23% of trans students; 15% of male sexual minority students; and 12% of female sexual minority students.
- Hardly any LGBTQ students reported that they never heard homophobic comments from other students (1% of trans students; 2% of female sexual minority students; 4% of male sexual minority students). This suggests that if you are a sexual minority student in a Canadian school, it is highly likely that you will hear insulting things about your sexual orientation.”

The report further states, “Students from schools with GSAs [Gay-Straight Alliances] are much more likely to agree that their school communities are supportive of LGBTQ people, are much more likely to be open with some or all of their peers about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and are more likely to see their school climate as becoming less homophobic.”

Consequently, the report recommends “[t]hat schools strongly support the efforts of students to start GSAs, or similar LGBTQ-inclusive student-led clubs, and that in schools where students have not come forward, administration should ask teachers to offer to work with students to start such clubs. It is not safe to assume that LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ parents would prefer to go through school isolated from their peers and teachers”

(www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp).



Although the TCDSB’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy does not make any reference to GSAs or similar LGBTQ-inclusive student-led groups, Egale encourages the TCDSB to support any and all of its students and staff members who wish to form and participate in a GSA and, further, that this intention be stated publicly in the TCDSB’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in accordance with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour, issued Oct. 19, 2009, which states, “Boards must also help school staff to give support to students who wish to participate in gay-straight alliances and in other student-led activities that promote understanding and development of healthy relationships.”



- Professional learning

11. The Board, in its delivery of student-centered Catholic educational services, is committed to providing the school community with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and systemic barriers under the *Code*.

Egale’s Comments on the TCDSB’s Draft Professional learning:

One of the Ministry’s Action Items in the Strategy under the focus area Professional Learning is “School boards will provide opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives” (23). The Guidelines state,

“Professional learning activities must be ongoing and based on evidence of positive results. A board is expected to provide opportunities for teachers, including guidance counsellors, and support staff, administrators, and trustees to participate in training on topics such as antiracism, antidiscrimination, and gender-based violence, and to provide information for students and parents to increase their knowledge and understanding of equity and inclusive education. A board is also expected to provide sensitivity training in the areas of gender and sexual orientation, as well as training in effective early intervention and prevention strategies and practices to deal with incidents related to racism, gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour” (29).

In line with this, Egale’s report *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (2011) recommends the following:

“That efforts begin with professional development workshops for all school division employees on intersectionality and the impact of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language and how to address it in classrooms, hallways, and all other parts of the school as well as at all other school-related events, such as during bus transportation” and that “school divisions provide professional development opportunities to assist schools in the implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive and intersectionality curriculum” (www.MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp).

To find resources, materials, information, and supports for teachers and other school staff members, consult the Educators’ Section of MyGSA.ca as well as Egale’s Equity and Inclusive Education Resource Kit for Ontario High Schools, which is available for free download: <http://MyGSA.ca/OntarioKit>.

To arrange for Ministry-approved anti-heterosexism, anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, anti-transphobia, and intersectionality workshops to be delivered to your school board or to schools within your board, contact mygsa@egale.ca or 416.964.7887.



- Accountability and transparency

12. The Board is committed to assessing and monitoring its progress in implementing the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy; to embedding the principles of equity and inclusive education into all Board policies, programs, guidelines and practices; and to communicating these results to the broader community. To that end an annual report will be made to Board on progress made with respect to the Strategy.