

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

### **Supporting LGBTQ Students, Families and Staff**

#### **Part 4: Creating policy to support LGBTQ students, families and staff**

(with Bryan Evans and Marlene Hansen, Edmonton Public Schools)

*Edmonton Public Schools, the first school board in western Canada to develop a comprehensive policy to support sexual and gender minority students, staff and families, shares lesson learned in this journey.*

#### **Key understandings:**

- The district's journey began in 2001 when a Grade 5 teacher was challenged on his suitability to teach human sexuality by a parent who questioned the teacher's 'lifestyle choice'; at the time, EPS did not have a sexual orientation and gender identity policy. Ultimately, the district supported the teacher, and this action led to the development of a comprehensive policy and administrative regulation designed to support sexual and gender minority students, staff and families.
- The policy outlines the board's commitment to support all those who identify as, or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual, Two Spirit, queer or questioning in their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
- The [policy](#) and [administrative regulation](#) clearly sets out the expectation that all members of this diverse community will be welcomed, respected, accepted and supported in all district schools.
- The policy also outlines that harassment, bullying, intimidation or discrimination on the basis of a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression will not be tolerated.
- An extensive community consultation during the development process helped build awareness and understanding throughout the district.
- A sexual orientation and gender identity panel, with representation from district staff, the community, Alberta Education, LGBTQ community members and parents of LGBTQ students, met for the initial two years of the policy implementation to ensure dialogue remained open and clear.
- The district provides a half-day of training to all new employees to build an understanding of the district policies that support students, staff and families.
- A team of teacher consultants also provides support to schools, including consultation, professional learning opportunities for staff, information sessions at school council meetings, and resources for teachers and administrators.

## *Supporting Every Student Learning Series*

### Creating policy to support LGBTQ students, families and staff

#### **Key understandings (cont.):**

- One strategy this district uses is having each school identify a designated staff member who acts as a safe contact.
- The role of the safe contact is to listen, consult, engage and advocate for and support sexual minority and questioning staff, students and their families.
- This safe contact staff member also encourages students and families to actively participate and contribute to their school and community without fear for their personal safety or well-being.
- All designated safe contacts participate in an initial three-hour training session, and become part of a network for sharing resources.
- Responding to ongoing and emerging issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity is an evolving process. As societal norms, expectations and language evolve, awareness and understanding change and evolve, and so must the policies and practices in Alberta schools and communities.

#### **Questions for reflection and discussion:**

- Where is your school or school district on the journey to better understanding issues and realities faced by students, staff and parents related to sexual orientation gender identity, and gender expression?
- What can be done to enhance this understanding and build a commitment to more inclusive and supportive learning environments?
- What can your school or district learn from this school authority's journey to better support sexual and gender minority students, staff and families?

#### **For more information:**

- The Alberta Government [infographic on supporting the LGBTQ community](#).
- Alberta Human Services' information on [LGBTQ supports](#).
- Alberta Education's [Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions](#).