

Porter Creek Secondary School
Gender and Sexuality Alliance
1405 Hickory Street
Whitehorse, YT
Y1A 4M4

November 5, 2019

Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee
Yukon Legislative Assembly
Box 2703
Whitehorse, YT
Y1A 2C6



PCSS GSA



Dear Minister McPhee,

The Porter Creek Secondary School's (PCSS) Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) is writing to you today in regards to the Yukon Department of Education's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Policy that came into effect in 09/05/2012.

It is the Department of Education's duty to provide a safe, welcoming, inclusive and affirming learning environment for all students and staff. We are pleased that the department "recognizes that students and school community members who identify as LGBTQ2S+ face a unique set of challenges within schools and communities, including being targets for discriminatory behaviors. All members of our school communities share the responsibility for supporting students and staff in addressing and facing these particular challenges." (SOGI, 2012) Through this letter, we hope to do our part in bringing forth positive changes for LGBTQ2S+ students and staff in all Yukon schools.

Having read through the SOGI Policy, our group has serious concerns about its implementation in Yukon schools and the degree to which it is being adhered. They are as follows:

- The department maintains that it will not permit or tolerate (zero tolerance) any homophobic behavior or bullying, yet these discriminatory and hateful acts take place every day in our schools. We feel staff and administrators in Yukon schools do not know how to appropriately respond to these incidents nor do they sufficiently know how to provide the necessary support for those who are intended or unintended targets of such behaviors.
 - How are school administrators ensuring that students and staff practice appropriate behavior and actions to prevent homophobic discrimination and harassment? Do they know what harmful effects they are responding to? In our experience, discrimination and harassment still occurs every day in Yukon schools and the affected students and staff are not being adequately supported.
- Our group is concerned that school-based policies intended to prohibit sexual discrimination do not state specific consequences of discrimination and harassment. We are asking that administrators document and respond to all acts and incidents of

homophobic and transphobic behavior and all actions taken following the occurrence of such incidents.

- Our group is concerned that staff and school administrators in Yukon schools are not responding to all complaints about homophobia and transphobia in a serious manner and have not been provided with specific policies and procedures to deal with such complaints effectively and consistently.
- Homophobic and transphobic language and behaviors are still commonplace in Yukon schools. This should not be tolerated and school codes of conduct need to be strengthened and specific in order to deal with these matters.
- School staff are expected to eliminate systemic inequities and barriers to learning for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientations or gender identity. Yet classes like Physical Education, for example, continue to contribute to the trauma experienced by Rainbow Students.
- Not all staff in Yukon schools model respect for Rainbow Students. Some do not address discrimination or harassment when it occurs; while others do not honor the pronouns of transgendered or non-binary/genderqueer students and even go so far as to invoke the deadname (given name at birth) of transgendered students. This is unacceptable.
- Very little of what is taught in Yukon Schools includes positive images or accurate information about the history and culture that reflects the accomplishments or contributions of LGBTQ2S+ people. Sex education for Rainbow Students is nonexistent.
- Not all staff in Yukon schools intervene in interactions involving the use of homophobic or transphobic epithets or slurs.
- School policies do not include specific procedures through which individuals or group-based complaints will be effectively resolved or which specify any consequences of breaching this standard of behavior.
- School based policies should be posted in a physical location in every school and not just posted on school websites.
- Our group is concerned that Yukon schools do not have at least one safe contact person for Rainbow Students. Administrators are responsible for informing students, parents and other staff of the location and availability of such an individual. This should occur in both elementary and secondary schools around the territory.
- Every school's safe contact for LGBTQ2S+ students is supposed to be offered additional training and resources so that they may be sensitive and respond knowledgeably to LGBTQ2S+ students or students with LGBTQ2S+ family members. They, in addition to school counselors, must receive this specialized training.
- The Department of Education **supports the right of LGBTQ2S+ students to counseling** that is supportive, affirming and free from efforts on the part of counselors to try to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity through the use of, or referral to, aversion or conversion therapy. Currently, Rainbow Students are not receiving clinical counselling and this is having a profound effect on their mental health. High school experiences can adversely affect LGBTQ2S+ youth in a profound manner for the rest of their lives. We also know that Rainbow Youth are already at a higher risk of mental

illness, substance abuse, addiction, and suicide. In our view, this should be a top priority for the Department of Education.

- Every school should have a GSA or Diversity Club and every school needs to have a designated safe space for all students – just like our PCSS Rainbow Room.

We are asking that the Yukon Department of Education update its SOGI Policy and review the practices at every Yukon school to ensure that the policy is being fully implemented.

We would like to invite you to the PCSS Rainbow Room in order to discuss our concerns and ways that we may support the department in ensuring that LGBTQ2S+ youth from around the territory are protected and able to achieve their fullest potential.

Thank you very much for your time and dedication to education and Yukon youth. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Students of the Porter Creek Secondary School's Gender and Sexuality Alliance

CC Minister Jeanie Dendys
 Misister Pauline Frost
 Kate White
 Stacey Hassard
 Souhail Soujah
 Sue Ross
 Nicole Morgan
 David Wipf
 Chris Stacey
 Karen Campbell