

Making School Safe For Everyone

Bullying can take many forms in schools – from name-calling to more serious forms of assault or harassment. The Vancouver School Board is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for all students and employees.

Under the British Columbia Human Rights Act and other laws, school districts in this province must provide a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination. School districts must also be working pro-actively to implement strategies and guidelines to ensure that all students, employees and families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life and treated with respect and dignity. This includes students and employees who identify themselves as lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender, or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Like our work addressing racism in schools, principals and teachers also must work to stop homophobia in our schools as well. Just as students learn that racist comments and acts are not acceptable, they are also learning that intolerance and hateful comments about gay and lesbian people are also not acceptable.

The provincial curriculum used in elementary schools touches upon many of these topics. Under the School Act, the imperative is placed upon the British Columbia public schools to mirror the diversity of the community and teach tolerance and understanding of difference.

Learning about diverse family models is part of the primary program where students of all ages learn the skills needed to work with and respect people who are the same as well as different from themselves. Children in the intermediate grades learn more specifically about the harmful effects of racism and other forms of discrimination like homophobia. They also learn how they can help make society a safer and more welcoming space for everyone. As the Supreme Court of Canada said: “Tolerance is always age-appropriate.”

In Vancouver, elementary schools are asked to appoint a Safe Contact Person. The Safe Contact Person is a teacher, principal, or other staff member who will help students who have questions about their sexual orientation or gender identity, who are dealing with bullying, or just need someone with whom they can talk and not be judged. Schools are asked to make all students aware of the location and availability of this person, and have done this in many different ways. Most schools are using posters, while others have also used assemblies, classroom meetings, or newsletters to share this information.

Responding to discrimination in all of its forms, and making sure that schools are safe and affirming spaces for all of our students, families, and staff is everyone’s job.

If you have any questions or concerns about homophobia, or lesbian and gay issues in Vancouver schools, please feel free to contact Glen Hansman or Jody Polukoshko at pride@vsb.bc.ca or 604-713-5180. If you have questions or concerns about racism or multiculturalism, please contact Angela Brown at 604-713-5933.