# THE FACTS ON EDUCATION

# How can schools support LGBTQ2 students?

While Canadian society is growing more diverse and inclusive, there is still resistance when it comes to supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2) youth in schools. Although recent research indicates that the vast majority of Canadian teachers (85%) now support LGBTQ2-inclusive education, many report not yet having the knowledge or training to feel confident in creating safer and more inclusive schools for LGBTQ2 youth.

**Here are four key factors that can make a positive difference in the lives of LGBTQ2 students in K-12 schools:**

**1. Inclusive Curriculum**

Visibility matters. LGBTQ2 students need to see themselves in their textbooks and in the halls and walls of their schools to feel welcome and included. Where appropriate, incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression topics into classroom discussions, lesson plans, curricular outcomes, and library collections.

**2. Supportive Teachers and Staff**

Teachers can be a supportive lifeline to help LGBTQ2 youth move from being at-risk of bullying, discrimination, and violence to developing a resilient mindset to overcome adversity in their lives. Staff can volunteer to serve as a "safe contact" at school – providing valuable sources of support for LGBTQ2 students and families.

**3. Comprehensive Policies**

School boards that pass comprehensive LGBTQ2 policies set clear expectations and authorize all staff to meet their legal obligations and become proactive in creating respectful, welcoming, inclusive, and safe working and learning environments. These policies need to be supported with high quality professional development and robust implementation plans.

**4. Visibility and Inclusion**

Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) help break the silence of inaction or indifference that still surrounds LGBTQ2 identities. Given the educational, health, and safety benefits of GSAs, Alberta, Ontario, and Manitoba have passed legislation supporting their start-up in schools. Teachers can become a GSA advisor and display safe space stickers and posters to show that they are allies. Establishing clearly visible all-gender universal washrooms and updating school forms, websites, and communications to become more gender inclusive recognizes that gender exists on a spectrum, not as a male/female binary. Educators have a responsibility to address homophobic and transphobic bullying and derogatory language whenever they see or hear it. LGBTQ2 information nights for families also help to dispel negative myths and stereotypes while creating awareness.

Combined, these actions represent important first steps for all school community members – including teachers, administrators, staff, students, and families – in building safer and more inclusive schools for all students, regardless of how they identify.

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