

Supporting Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions

These guidelines for supporting students, staff and community members with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions are based on practices most consistently identified in current research and educational literature as effective and appropriate in the creation of learning environments that are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe for students, staff, families and all other members of the school community.

Best practices include:

1. Providing supports that respond to an individual's needs.
2. Respecting an individual's right to self-identification.
3. Maintaining school records in a way that respects privacy and confidentiality.
4. Ensuring dress codes respect an individual's gender identity and gender expression.
5. Enabling students with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions to have full, safe and equitable participation in curricular and extracurricular activities.
6. Providing safe access to washroom and change-room facilities.
7. Providing professional learning opportunities that build the capacity of staff to understand and support diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.
8. Using a comprehensive whole-school approach to promote healthy relationships and prevent and respond to bullying behaviour.
9. Ensuring students have the understanding, skills and opportunities to contribute to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.
10. Ensuring all families are welcomed and supported as valued members of the school community.
11. Ensuring that school staff have work environments where they are protected from discrimination based on their sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All persons, including students, have a right to privacy, and this includes the right to keep one's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression private at school. There is no need for everyone in the school to know whether a student is transgender or gender diverse, particularly if they are new to the school. For the student, making decisions about what information is shared, with whom and when, is crucial to their health and wellbeing. All decisions about sharing information should be made with their explicit consent (or parental consent for students unable to give explicit consent). Information should only be shared with those who have an appropriate reason to know and be limited to what they need to know.

If a student is transitioning, the school shall act in accordance with the following developmentally appropriate guidelines, with the understanding that each student situation should be handled according to the maturity of each individual student, while still respecting

that student's rights. It is important to note that not all transitions are binary, meaning male-to-female or female-to-male.

Generally, the parent or guardian will inform the school of an impending transition. However, it would be appropriate for the section counselor or school psychologist to approach the family of a student if school staff believes that a gender identity or expression issue is presenting itself at school and creating difficulty for the student. Together, the family and school can then identify appropriate steps to support the student.

By MS/HS, notification of the student's parents or guardians about their gender identity, gender expression, or transition may be unnecessary, as they may already be aware and supportive. In some cases, however, notifying parents or guardians carries risks for the student, such as being kicked out of the home. Prior to notification of any parent or guardian regarding the transition process, the section counselor or school psychologist will work closely with the student to assess the degree to which, if at all, the parent or guardian will be involved in the process and must consider the health, wellbeing, and safety of the transitioning student.

Name and Pronouns

Every student has the right to be addressed by a name and pronouns that correspond to the student's gender identity. Regardless of whether a transgender or gender diverse student has legally changed their name or gender, AISC will allow such students to use a chosen name and gender pronouns that reflect their identity. Some transgender and gender diverse youth may feel most comfortable being addressed by gender-neutral pronouns such as "they" or "ze" or just referred to by their names (without pronouns). If the student has previously been known at AISC by a different name, the section counselor will direct faculty to use the student's chosen name and preferred pronouns. To ensure consistency among departments of the school, every effort will be made to immediately update student education records with the student's chosen name and appropriate gender markers. Records with the student's birth name and gender will be kept in a separate, confidential file.

Access to School Facilities

Having safe access to washrooms and changerooms is important to the health and wellbeing of all people, including those who identify as transgender and gender diverse. Students are allowed to use the washrooms and change rooms consistent with their gender identity, unless they request alternate accommodations. Any student, transgender or otherwise, who has a need or desire for increased privacy, regardless of underlying reasons, also has the right to access a single-user restroom, such as a staff washroom. However, the single-user washroom will not be given as the only option for transgender or gender diverse students.

Overnight Trips

Students have the opportunity to room with peers that match their gender identity, and AISC will work to pair transgender students with peers and, when relevant, with homestay families with whom there is a mutual level of comfort. Whether or not roommates know about the student's gender identity, the school has an obligation to maintain the student's privacy and cannot require disclosure of the student's transgender status to the other students or their parents. The school will consider requests for alternative sleeping arrangements for any

student, transgender or otherwise, who has a need or desire regardless of underlying reasons.

Dress code

Students have the right to dress in accordance with their gender identity, within the constraints of the AISC dress code.

Education

Educating the school community about diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions is an important strategy in creating a safer and more inclusive school. AISC will look to include these topics as part of the teaching and learning program for students, faculty and parents.

Source Documents

Alberta Government, Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions. 2016

District of Columbia Public Schools, Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Policy Guidance. June 2015.

GLSEN, Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students. February 2016

Safe Schools Coalition AUS, Guide to supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school. 2016

National Association of Secondary School Principals, Position Statements - Transgender Students. 2016

Social Meanness, Bullying and Harassment

We believe that every child has the right to learn in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Social meanness, harassment and bullying are not acceptable behaviors at AISC. We, as a school, undertake proactive and preventive approaches to ensure a safe environment. Our policy is to promote a positive school environment in the classroom, common areas, and at school-sponsored activities.

It is also the goal of AISC to maintain a safe and supportive school environment for all students free from harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying and free from discrimination on account of actual or perceived race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, size or weight.

Mean behavior is purposeful and hurtful, but may happen only once or twice. It can be exhibited through acts such as teasing or name-calling, social exclusion, insults, threats, hitting, pushing, kicking and may occur either in person or electronically. Bullying is defined as any of the above acts that are intentionally cruel, usually repeated, and with a social or interpersonal power imbalance, where one person feels they do not have the power to stop it.

Mean behavior, harassment and bullying can take many forms including social, verbal, online, and/or physical incidents and, in addition to the examples above, might include:

Physical Aggression: Unwelcome physical contact, inflicting bodily harm, physical contact with sexual overtones

Social Alienation: Public humiliation, malicious exclusion, malicious rumor mongering, threats of isolation

Verbal Aggression: Intimidating phone calls, texts, emails, verbal threats of aggression of property and possessions, verbal threats of bodily harm; and/or

Intimidation: Extortion, taunting, threats toward family members, coercion, use of demeaning nicknames, catcalling.

For the purposes of these guidelines, harassment and bullying consist of the repeated exposure over time to negative actions targeted at a specific victim(s). However, should the act be grievous, repeated exposure is unnecessary for the behavior to be considered in violation of the school's behavioral expectations and for disciplinary action to be taken.

Guidelines for Situations Involving Social Meanness, Bullying or Harassment

Consistent with processes for resolving other complaints or grievances at AISC, reports of harassment and bullying will be resolved at the lowest level possible. Therefore, a member of the school community who believes he or she has been subjected to harassment or bullying should first consider telling the person(s) that the conduct is offensive and request them to stop.

If it is difficult for a student to speak directly to the person, or if the offensive behavior does not stop after the request to cease, or if the student or parent feel that they need assistance with an ongoing issue of social meanness or bullying, they should bring it to the attention of a teacher, section counselor and/or section Principals. The situation will be assessed as either a counseling issue or a discipline issue and referred accordingly for further action. These actions will be developmentally appropriate and may range from a session with the counselor to disciplinary meetings with the administration. For serious incidents of misconduct, consequences may include suspension or expulsion from AISC.

Note: A person who knowingly makes a false report of harassment and bullying may also be considered to have violated this policy, and subject to the courses of action and consequences herein.

Education and Prevention

The prevention of social meanness and bullying requires a thoughtful educational program. The school will include in its educational program, information about social meanness and bullying as appropriate (for example classroom guidelines, character education) so that everyone will understand the intention of this policy, the appropriate ways to interact with others, and what to do if a person feels they are being impacted by social meanness or bullying as defined by the policy.