



Creating a Positive Space

Supporting our transgender students

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Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) is committed to continue to progress toward equity and inclusion of all individuals in our system.

An Equity Task Force was launched in the Fall of 2020 to support the Board in developing a strategic plan related to equity and inclusion in TLDSB. In order to provide meaningful educational experiences and opportunities to our students, we must understand the culture, beliefs, and identities of our students, and embed into our practices a lens of equity, high student achievement and well-being.



Feed All Four

Supporting the body, mind, spirit, and emotions of an individual increases a sense of well-being, connectedness and resilience, and improves student achievement. This Feed All Four way of being applies to all students and is incorporated into all aspects of Positive Space in TLDSB schools.



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Helping you to navigate this document

The following terms are used extensively throughout this document. There are many more important terms that are helpful to learn in support of transgender students and their families. More important definitions are found at the end of this document.

Transgender: A transgender or trans person is someone whose lived gender experience does not match the sex they were assigned at birth based on their biological anatomy.

Gender Expression: How a person behaves, appears, or presents themselves with regard to societal expectations of gender.

Gender Identity: A person's internal sense or feeling of being female, male, a combination of both, or neither, regardless of their sex assigned at birth.





A welcoming environment for all students

A welcoming environment in our schools is important for all students. Schools may have transgender students but not know it yet. A transgender student may perceive the environment to be unsafe and unwelcoming. It is not okay for transgender students to be invisible in our schools. TLDSB BD – 2100 Equity and Inclusive Education Policy explicitly states:

Trillium Lakelands District School Board believes that, regardless of race, ethnicity and cultural identity, citizenship status, place of origin, physical and intellectual ability, marital status, family status, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, creed, age, and other forms of marginalization and the intersection thereof, all members of the school community deserve to work and learn in safe and caring learning environment.

There are many things school staff can do to be supportive and to provide a welcoming and safe environment for all students, including transgender students. Most changes are easy to implement, simple, and require no new resources.

It begins with creating awareness amongst staff and students, working from a vision of providing quality, inclusive learning environments for all students. Encouraging communication from families in developing an inclusive plan for your school could be a first step.

It is important to remember that all students have a right to privacy. Unless specifically directed by the student, schools must keep a student's transgender/gender status confidential. This knowledge is shared only with those who need to know to fulfill a specific accommodation, or if the student requests it.



Common beliefs about gender

Without a doubt, gender has an enormous impact on who we are as people. Over the past few decades, society's ideas about the roles and gender identities of women and men have progressed significantly. However, outdated and oppressive views of gender continue to circulate in our everyday understandings of what it means to be human. To resist reinforcing these harmful beliefs, we must be conscious of the overt and covert assumptions and values we have about gender and how they affect students' sense of safety and inclusion.

Misconceptions and facts

Misconception: Gender exists in a binary: everyone is either male or female

Fact: Gender exists across a spectrum of possibilities.

Misconception: Gender identity is realized by age two and does not change.

Fact: Some people continue to move along the gender spectrum throughout their lifetime.

Misconception: Gender is determined by one's anatomy.

Fact: Gender is determined by a person's inner sense of who they are.

Misconception: Males should have a masculine style of expression and females should have a feminine style of expression.

Fact: A more inclusive culture would allow everyone to express themselves in a style that makes them feel confident and comfortable.

The following two groups of people are especially marginalized by misconceptions about gender: those whose style of expression is gender non-conforming and those that are transgender. There are students and families from both of these groups in our schools. It is crucial that we all acknowledge and respect their identities to make our school a safe and inclusive place for them.

Gender non-conforming

A child's style of expression is considered gender non-conforming when it consistently falls outside of what is considered 'normal' for their assigned biological sex. This may be indicated by choices in games, clothing, and playmates. For example, a boy who wants to take ballet, wear pink, and play primarily with girls is gender non-conforming. Gender non-conforming children may become 'normative' over time or their style of expression may continue to defy gender expectations as adults. *Some* of these children become transgender.

Transgender

A transgender person is someone whose inner gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological anatomy. For example, a transgender child self-identifies as a girl but was born with the anatomy of a male. Some children and adults self-identify as both masculine and feminine or neither masculine nor feminine. These people fit under the term 'transgender' as well. Transgender people have existed throughout history in cultures all over the globe. Trans can also be used as an umbrella term for the following identities: nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, gender-neutral, genderqueer, androgynous.



Challenges for a transgender student

The world can be an unsafe place for transgender students – but we can change that.

Facts:

- Transgender students experience verbal and physical harassment, assault, teasing, social exclusion, and have their property stolen or damaged at higher rates than any other student group. In addition, the more frequent harassment that trans students experience, the lower their grades and educational aspirations.
- Transgender students drop out of school at higher rates than other students because they feel unsafe.
- Transgender students might use drugs to cope with this stress.
- Transgender students might contemplate suicide.

Source: Durham District School Board: Supporting Our Transgender Students

When a transgender student is a visible minority, they can experience additional challenges. These challenges can add to the stress of transition.

[EGALE Canada's \(2011\) school climate survey](#) revealed:

- 50 percent reported that staff never intervened when homophobic or transphobic comments were made.
- 78 percent of trans students felt unsafe at school.
- 90 percent of trans students hear transphobic comments daily or weekly from other students.
- 23 percent of trans students report hearing teachers using transphobic language daily or weekly.
- 74 percent of trans students reported being verbally harassed because of their gender expression.

Most transgender students report being victims of transphobic behaviour in the form of chronic, severe bullying in school. Some trans students report objects having been thrown at them, being beaten by other students, and receiving death threats. Many are verbally abused and ridiculed. Some describe themselves as friendless and “outcasts”. Some of the harassment occurs in the classroom, but can be “subtle” and “one-on-one” and escape the teacher’s notice. The majority of harassment happens outside of teacher and staff view – in the hallways, washrooms, and outside on school grounds.



The alienation of these students is compounded by the lack of relevant curricula and resources and/or misinformation that is circulated regarding their identities. Gender specific school spaces, such as single sex washrooms and changerooms, add to the social stress of school. Transgender students feel discouraged when their own initiatives and efforts to improve the school environment are met with indifference or resistance.

Studies show that compounding this reported peer harassment is the fact that trans students experience teacher indifference and a lack of mentorship. Transgender students have difficulty talking to school staff about harassment. Students may doubt that there is much staff can do to effectively address verbal harassment and intimidation. Some students fear that staff will not take their complaints seriously or that peer violence will escalate if they make a report. Transgender students may feel that some teachers and principals tacitly approve of the violence and harassment when they don't step in, ignore what is happening, or give bullies a "slap on the wrist" as a consequence.

Another barrier faced by some trans students is a lack of understanding or support from home. Unlike other groups, where all members of the family are experiencing the same oppression or discrimination, trans students do not always receive empathy and may even be victims of transphobic behaviour in their own home.



Positive Spaces for transgender students in Trillium Lakelands District School Board

Everyone is protected from harassment based on gender identity and expression.

The Human Rights Code protects an individual's right to live their own gender identity.

Transgender people are to be recognized and respected as the gender they live in.
As a publicly funded school board, it is a shared responsibility with our school communities
to welcome and accommodate the needs of transgender people.



Create a welcoming environment

- ▶ Always address and accommodate people in the gender in which they identify, unless they specifically request otherwise. If you are unsure, ask the person how they prefer to be addressed. Most transgender people will use pronouns based on their identified gender (he, she, they).
- ▶ Develop a school protocol for consistent use of transgender students' preferred names and pronouns on school-generated material. For example, a student's "preferred or chosen name" can be used on class lists, timetables, etc.
- ▶ Ensure that all students know they have access to a washroom/change room that best corresponds to the student's lived gender experience. Also ensure students have access to a private single use washroom which is gender-neutral and does not require a student to ask permission or request a key. A transgender student will not be required to use a separate facility because of the preferences or negative attitudes of others.
- ▶ Ensure that students are aware that they have the right to participate in gender-segregated sports and gym class activities in accordance with their lived gender experience.
- ▶ Plan for and accommodate change room access, which may include use of the lived gender experience change room, a private area (washroom or office), or a separate changing schedule. A transgender student will not be required to use a separate facility because of the preferences or negative attitudes of others.
- ▶ Have transgender-related fiction and nonfiction books in the school library, guidance offices, and main office.
- ▶ Promote and highlight the work and initiatives of the school GSA. Make sure that trans students know that they are welcome to join the GSA or participate in GSA-run activities.
- ▶ React immediately to harassment of a trans youth and identify the specific behaviour as being homophobic or transphobic.
- ▶ Use correct terminology and language in referring to transgender youth.
- ▶ Avoid using gender as a way to create groups, lineups, or taking turns. This will alleviate the need to conform to specific gender roles.
- ▶ Review existing dress codes to ensure they are respectful and inclusive of the gender identities and gender expressions of all members of the school community (e.g., rules apply equally and fairly to all students and are not gender-exclusive, such as implying that a certain type of clothing, such as skirts, will be worn by one gender only).
- ▶ Meet, discuss, and support students and their families in creating a plan that will work for the individual. Not all needs are the same and not all plans work for everyone, therefore plans are made on a case by case basis. When appropriate, invite an open dialogue with the student to make a personalized plan.
- ▶ Be willing to have professional, albeit challenging conversations with students and parents about TLDSB inclusive policies and practices.



Learning for your school community

- ▶ Become familiar with and share the TLDSB BD – 2100 and BD - 2101 Equity and Inclusive Education Policy and Procedure.
- ▶ Integrate transgender-sensitivity and advocacy training into staff professional development curricula.
- ▶ Train staff to identify and confront transphobia in the school.
- ▶ If unsure, seek out other staff members to support you and/or your students (for example: GSA leads, ILs, SERTs, guidance counsellors, Equity Task Force members).
- ▶ Integrate transgender content into school curriculum through transgender-related texts, topics and discussions.
- ▶ Have your GSA students present to your staff and parent council to share perspectives.
- ▶ Invite LGBTQ-identified guest speakers into your classroom or school.
- ▶ Do an equity walk of your classrooms, resources, documents and policies to identify and ensure inclusive language and representation. An equity walk is similar to the walk-throughs that we do for SEF visits - the difference involves looking at the physical setup of the classroom and the school building through a lens of inclusiveness.
- ▶ Prepare your staff and greater school community with the language to navigate professional, yet challenging conversations.



Important definitions

Biological sex: The sex assigned at birth based on external genitalia but also includes internal reproductive structures and chromosomes.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity aligns with their biological sex (e.g. a person who is biologically female and identifies as a woman).

Intersex: A person who has male and female genetic and/or physical sex characteristics.

Sexual orientation: A description of how a person experiences sexual and romantic attraction. Sexual orientations can include asexual (not experiencing sexual attraction), heterosexual (experiencing attraction to another sex), lesbian and gay (experiencing attraction to the same sex), bisexual (experiencing attraction to more than one sex) and more. It's important to remember that all of us have both a sexual orientation and a gender identity. Knowing a person's trans status does not give you any information on their sexual orientation.

Transphobia: Hatred, suspicion, or fear of anyone whose gender identity and gender expression does not conform to society's expectations for their biological sex.

Transgender-woman/girl: Someone who was born male and identifies as woman.

Transgender-man/boy: Someone who was born female and identifies as man.

Transition: A process some transgender people go through when they decide to live as the gender with which they identify, not the one assigned at birth. This may or may not include changes to appearance, identity documents, hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery, and other medical components.

Two-spirit: Some Indigenous people identify themselves as two-spirit rather than as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender. Historically, in many Indigenous cultures, two-spirit persons were respected leaders and medicine people with specific roles in communities. Before colonization, two-spirit persons were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives.

Pronouns: Students may choose to use traditional pronouns such as he, she, or they may prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns such as ze, zir, hir, they, or them.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Durham District School Board for their document “Supporting Our Transgender Students” which helped to develop these guidelines for Trillium Lakelands District School Board.

Thank you as well to those who contributed their experience and knowledge of diverse gender identities and gender expressions in the development of these guidelines. Trillium Lakelands District School Board is committed to creating welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments across our board.



Appendix



Subject area discussions about gender identity issues

(Source: Durham District School Board: Supporting Our Transgender Students)

Students should be invited to question various aspects of gender identity, biologically, genetically, and socially. This can be done in the context of many different academic subject areas. Some examples are:

English

Provide students with materials depicting characters in non gender stereotyped ways. When studying classical literature that may contain gender stereotypes, discuss this with students, including the connection to social norms and evolution of societal issues.

Book List with LGBTTQQ2S Characters

www.goodreads.com/list/tag/transgender

Top 10 Transgender books recommended by The Guardian

www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/21/top-10-transgender-books

Social Sciences

Discuss how gender roles differ through time and by region. Provide students with a context for how changes come about through shifts in attitude, understanding, laws, scientific discovery, etc.

The Way of 2 Spirited People

www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org/twospirit.php

University of Victoria appoints a Transgender Studies Chair

www.uvic.ca/research/transchair

Science

Have students consider the genetic differences between sexes and the scientific definition of male and female. Introduce the notion of intersexuality. Discuss varieties in gender roles through the animal kingdom in terms of reproduction, mating rituals, caregiving, and nurturing roles.

Sexual Animal Behaviour

www.bbc.com/earth/story/20150206-are-there-any-homosexual-animals

A Genderfluid Lion

www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/12/23/scientists-discover-genderfluid-lioness-who-looks-acts-and-roars-like-a-male



Subject area discussions about gender identity issues

Math

Have a class discussion on famous mathematicians of the past and present. Discuss the dominance of men in the field and possible reasons for that. Have students challenge the long-held notion that girls aren't good at math and challenge this belief. Examine some data around harassment and bullying of individuals that identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Statistics about bullying and harassment of LGBTQ individuals

www.aclu.org/doing-math-what-numbers-say-about-harassment-gay-lesbian-bisexual-and-transgender-students

Languages

How does gender connect to language? For example, how we are limited by the lack of a singular, gender-neutral pronouns in English? Do other languages have such a pronoun? What is happening to gender-laden words in every language such as policeman? In a language like French, objects have gender, what are your thoughts about this? How was each gender decided? Do they follow stereotypical lines or are there unusual examples?

Conversation around which pronouns to use

www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2013/01/trans-people-pronouns-and-language

Academic conversations around the use of pronouns

<https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns>

The impact of gendered language on our social fabric

www.psychologytoday.com/blog/culture-conscious/201209/masculine-or-feminine-and-why-it-matters

Physical Education

Ask students what they think of the fact that their school either does or does not separate PE classes by gender? Is there a good reason for separation? Is there a good reason not to separate? How might a transgender student cope with the current system?

A close examination of the current policies for inclusivity in American Schools

www.transathlete.com/#!k-12/c4w2

Respecting the Rights of Transgender students in TDSB schools

www.nsba.org



Subject area discussions about gender identity issues

Arts

Deconstruct gender stereotyping in arts classes (e.g., music—flute players are female; trumpet players are male; girls sing in the choir; dance—only girls dance; media arts—only guys are computer savvy; drama—no females on stage in Shakespeare’s time) and discuss famous exceptions to these stereotypes. Discussion on why these stereotypes exist to broaden student experience.

Museum of Transgender History & Art

www.sfmoma.org

Transgender Artists that are Changing Contemporary Art

www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/26/trans-artists_n_5023294.html

Technological Studies

Challenge gender stereotyping in tech classes (e.g., only males are auto mechanics; only females take cooking; only males do woodworking; only females do hairdressing; only males do welding; only females do fashion design) and discuss famous exceptions to these stereotypes. Examine new places for Transgender individuals to find work and success in the trades and tech fields.

Transgender hackathon; creating tech for the Transgender and Gender Non-conforming community

www.transhack.org

TransTech is an incubator for 2SLGBTQIA+ Talent with a focus on economically empowering transgender people in our community.

<http://transtechsocial.org>

In all subject areas, discussions about gender identity and gender roles and stereotypes can help students think more openly and critically about the world around them and their place within it. It is always crucial to maintain a trusting and respectful classroom environment where such discussions can happen without the risk of rude remarks or put-downs. Adolescence is an important time for gender identity development and thinking about gender identity, and teachers can help students think critically about many gender identity-related issues while staying true to the subject curriculum and social responsibility goals.



Frequently asked questions

How do I know if a person is transgender?

The only way to know if a person is transgender is if the person tells you they are. An individual is to be considered the final authority on their own gender identity.

What pronoun do I use when addressing someone who is transgender?

It is always respectful to refer to a person using the pronouns they prefer. Just ask, “by which pronoun would you like me to call you?”. If you are not sure about the pronoun, you can always use the student’s name.

What should I do with the information that a person is transgender?

Unless otherwise directed by the individual, information about a person’s status as transgender should be treated as confidential.

How do I answer questions from other parents or adults about a transgender student?

School boards have the responsibility to treat everyone’s personal information as confidential. However, if they have specific questions related to what it means to be transgender you can refer them to resources found at the end of this document.

How should I handle specific questions about a transgender student’s physical body?

Remind the person asking questions that physical bodies are generally considered private, and that in most contexts it is inappropriate to ask about a person’s genitals or hormones. If they are looking for information about transgender people and transition, they can look for general information and should not be targeting an individual.

How do I answer questions from the other students about a transgender student?

Education, including supportive and affirming language for discussing gender identity and expression is available in this document. Use these guidelines to support your discussion. Keep in mind, every student has a right to privacy however discussing rights and information about gender identity and expression in general, is encouraged. Other resources are also available in your school. Do not refer to the transgender person as the person with all the answers.

If a student in my class discloses that they are transgender, what can I do to be supportive?

Schools work in cooperation with students (and their caregivers) to develop a plan that will meet their needs. Work with the principal/vice-principal to create that plan. The school will work to provide any accommodations that are necessary.

What do I do if someone says something that is transphobic?

This is an opportunity for learning. React immediately to the transphobic comment and state that this is offensive and inappropriate. If the comment is directed towards a specific individual, label this behaviour as harassment and be sensitive to the privacy of the targeted individual. Human Rights Code protects individual rights to live in one’s own gender identity. Transgender people are to be recognized and respected as the gender they live in.



What washroom/changeroom does a transgender person use?

Individuals have the right to use the washroom or change room that corresponds with the gender with which they identify. Wherever possible, TLDSB buildings provide an easily-accessible, all-gender, single use washroom/change room for use by anyone who desires increased privacy, regardless of the underlying reason.

What if the parents/guardian of a student in my class are concerned about the physical safety of their child and does not want their child using the washroom/change room with a transgender student?

Transgender students using the washroom that they identify with does not cause physical safety concerns. You may use the following phrase, "If you have concerns, or your child is uncomfortable, they have the right to use the single-use facilities."



Links and resources

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals

Brill, Stephanie A. and Pepper, Rachel. (2008) U.S.A. Cleis Press.

Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide For Parents of Trans Youth

Central Toronto Youth Services (2008 www.ctys.org/sites/default/files/familiesintransitiona_resource_guide_for_parents-080608.pdf)

Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children

Ehrensaft, Diane. (2011). New York: The Experiment.

Gender Journey - is a free 10-week group that explores gender identity and gender roles
www.cmhahkpr.ca

Gender Creative Kids - is a Canadian web portal of information and resources for trans youth and adults who support them.
www.gendercreativekids.ca.

It's Pronounced Metrosexual - is a site where advocates of social justice can find helpful articles, fun graphics, and other resources designed to be shared in an effort to advance social equity. It's a site that helps people help people be better people. The author of the site is the creator of the Genderbread person referenced in Appendix A www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com.

Supportive organizations:

Trans Lifeline - is a non-profit dedicated to the wellbeing of trans people who run a hotline staffed by trans people. Visit www.translifeline.org or call (877 330-6366).

LGBTQ Youth Line - offers peer support and referrals to LGBTQ youth. Visit www.youthline.ca.

Rainbow Health Ontario - keeps a database of supportive material about gender independence. Some resources are accessible online, others can be ordered. Visit www.rainbowhealthontario.ca.

PFLAG Canada - is Canada's national organization that helps Canadians with issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Visit www.pflagcanada.ca/en/index.html

Gilbert Centre - for Muskoka area LGBTQ resources. Visit www.gilbertcentre.ca.

PARN - is Peterborough Aids Resource Network for Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton LGBTQ resources. Visit www.parn.ca



by its pronounced **MEIRQ** sexual.

Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity; combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread

4 (of infinite) possible plot and label combos



