

Live in Colour: GSA of Chinook Park School

Artwork Courtesy of Ms. Lori Follis



Safe and Caring Community

- Schools in the Calgary Board of Education have the shared responsibility to cultivate environments that are welcoming, safe, caring and respectful for all students.
- It is important to affirm and celebrate all students and to provide them with opportunities to thrive in life and learning.
- Chinook Park School completed much work in building on our work of the Zones of Regulation and building safe and caring communities (TTFM data)

What is a GSA?

- Gay–straight student alliances (GSAs) are student run and teacher-supported school-based groups that work to create welcoming, caring, respectful and safe spaces for sexual and gender minority students **and their allies** in schools.
- Essentially, GSAs are designed to provide a safe space that **respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging**.
- They are treated like any other student club in school. It is a space where LGBTQ students feel accepted, safe, and not isolated.

What is the purpose of a GSA in Elementary Schools?

- The purpose of a GSA is for students to meet, socialize and support one another.
- Students may wish to discuss their feelings and experiences related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
- Students will have a chance to attend the GSA one day a week during their lunch break. It will give them a safe space to make new friends and to provide support for one another.

Research Based Information

- Studies have shown that LGBTQ students say that knowing there is a “gay-positive” teacher or safe space in their school can contribute to their feelings of safety and well-being. Research shows that sexual identity is established in early childhood (Ryan and Futterman 1998).
- Many students have a sense of their sexual orientation and gender identity as early as Grade 1. As a result, it is important that elementary teachers become aware of this developmental factor and provide the necessary resources and support to ensure that sexual minority students develop a positive self-identity.
- Furthermore, many students come from sexual minority families or have sexual minority siblings. It is important for these students to feel that their families and identities are a valued and visible part of the school and classroom community.

Research Based Information

- In the 1990s the age of young people “coming out” (stating they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-identified) was approximately 18–20 years; however, in this decade there are more students coming out earlier. Due to the gradual societal shift towards acceptance and equity, educators are recognizing their responsibilities to engage appropriately with these topics in their classrooms.
- Elementary educators are often the first to understand the gender issues of young children and often deal with them as bullying issues. Opening young minds to these topics at an early age will promote a lifelong understanding and respect for diversity.

Important to Know

- Importantly, GSAs are a confidential space in which no assumptions are made about anyone's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Some members of a GSA may be sexual and gender minority students, while others may have sexual and gender minority friends or family and want to become supportive allies.
- As a result, assumptions about a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (whether the person is perceived as heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual or trans-identified) should never be made. Parental consent or notification is not required to participate in a GSA. In fact, "outing" students can place them at great risk.

What will Students Do?

- Eat their lunch and make new friends 😊
- Play games with each other and have fun 😊
- Meet new teachers and build community 😊
- GSAs are student-led and teacher supported 😊
- Students will decide what the goal of the GSA will be and what activities they would like to be involved in. We will make connections and have activities that are tied to our Safe and Caring Virtues that are already in place. 😊

What GSAs are NOT

- Classes to discuss anything relating to human growth and sexuality (Teachers will NOT be instructing lessons regarding these topics)
- “Dating” Clubs
- An official endorsement of sexuality
- Only for LGBTQ students
- Anti-Faith or Religious
- Promoting of one’s sexuality

Where Can I Get Information?

- Please see
https://portal.cbe.ab.ca/staffinsite/teaching/instructional_supports_services/gender_identity/Documents/FAQ-Parents-Guardians-Guidelines-LGBTQ-February-2016.pdf
- <https://education.alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools/safe-and-caring-schools/?searchMode=3>
- <http://resources.safeandcaring.ca/resource-diversity/>

Questions? Feedback?

- The focus is and will always be about the students and their feelings of safety and care.
- Our goal is to support the full range of uniqueness for all humanity.