

BRITISH COLUMBIA HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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The Honourable Mike Bernier, Minister of Education
Room 134, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

September 2, 2016

Support LGBTQ students in independent schools

Dear Minister

In January, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth published its *Final Report: Child and Youth Mental Health in British Columbia*. Among its recommendations, the committee identified homophobic and transphobic bullying of youth as serious issues to be addressed and called on the provincial government to:

“require school districts to support sexual and gender minority youth in schools through general and targeted programs to address child and youth mental health issues.”¹

Similarly, the Government of Alberta is currently putting pressure on all schools and school boards to develop policies to support LGBTQ students and staff. Your counterpart, The Honourable David Eggen, Minister of Education, has said that it is “not acceptable” that some religious private schools are reportedly planning to flout the law. He is looking at taking action against them should their policies fail to protect LGBTQ students’ rights. Many members of the public are calling for the province to remove funding from private schools that refuse to comply.²

British Columbia provides the vast majority of independent schools with public funding. Yet there is little evidence that many of these schools have taken steps to support and include LGBTQ students. For example, following a human rights complaint, the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver Archdiocese board introduced a policy “regarding Gender Expression and Gender Dysphoria” in 2014. This policy was one of the first of its kind for a Catholic school board, yet it still diminishes the gender identities of its students with a strict adherence to doctrine.³

Another study of BC's teachers by University of Winnipeg researchers released in January 2016 found that British Columbia is falling behind other provinces in promoting LGBTQ-inclusive education.⁴

While we recognize the positive contributions the Government of British Columbia has made to fighting bullying and harassment in schools through the ERASE strategy, specific and targeted action is clearly required to support LGBTQ students in public and private schools across BC.

Simply put, will the Government of British Columbia follow Alberta's lead in taking real action to support LGBTQ students and staff in all BC schools, whether public or independent?

Yours sincerely



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cc

Rob Fleming, Official Opposition Critic for Education , BC NDP
Andrew Weaver, Leader, BC Greens

¹ *Concrete Actions for Systemic Change. Final Report Child and Youth Mental Health in British Columbia.* Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth. January 2016.

² Janet French. "Funding at risk for religious schools that won't respect students' rights, education minister says." *Edmonton Journal*. Sep 1, 2016.

³ Lauren Strapagiel, "Vancouver Catholic schools' transgender policy doesn't go far enough." *Canada.com*. July 17, 2014.

⁴ Taylor, C., Peter, T., Campbell, C., Meyer, E., Ristock, J., & Short, D. (2015). *The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada's K-12 schools: Final report*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Teachers' Society.