

An Alberta Parent's Call to Action: When Parents Lose Rights, Children are Endangered

NDP Education Minister Eggen has declared that Alberta's schools must seek a student's explicit permission before disclosing information related to the student's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression to his or her parents. This new requirement is the most damning guideline of the many questionable suggestions listed in the Guidelines for Best Practices-Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions. Schools are being coerced to isolate parents from their own children, thereby severing the parent-child bond that is essential to the mental health of every child.

Parents, including strong LGBTQ community supporters, would oppose this guideline – which is actually a requirement – if they understood the danger to a child when the parent/child bond is destroyed. The argument that this guideline is necessary because some parents may reject their child is unfounded. The vast majority of parents prove to be loving towards their children regardless of sexual orientation. In the rare cases where children are not given adequate care from parents, support can and is provided by outside resources on an individual basis.

This guideline will only serve to isolate children who are confronting one of the most difficult and confusing moments of their young lives with the

cumulative pressure of having to decide when, if ever, to invite their parents into the discussion. Put another way, the Government of Alberta would have you believe that out of fear that a parent may respond negatively, every Alberta student should be counselled to hide their struggles from their parents preemptively. It is nonsensical to counsel children to isolate themselves in order to avoid being isolated. The very reasoning for the measure is the outcome of its implementation. This solution is no solution at all.

The government has used elevated suicide risk in transgender students as the reason why transgender accommodations are necessary in schools. Yet a 2008 pro-transgender survey of the transgender community in the United States by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force with the National Center for Transgender Equality states that individuals that accept their gender identity completely still suffer far greater suicide risk than the general population. In fact the report -- *Injustice at Every Turn* -- states, "Those who have medically transitioned and surgically transitioned have higher rates of attempted suicide than those who have not."

According to this report the transgender population is in danger of increased suicide risk regardless of the extent to which they are given the opportunity to live in accordance with their perceived sexual orientation. This should send alarm bells to every parent. Alberta parents cannot assume that heavy-handed guidelines that

coerce schools to accommodate transgender students will automatically protect these children from self-harm. Children need the love and care of those closest to them; their parents. Yet these very guidelines would leave a parent ignorant and therefore helpless to assist.

Who will be to blame if children are lost? The parents, because they put their faith in the authorities and were unaware they were being kept ignorant of their child's needs? The teacher and school that hid the child's struggles from the child's parents? Or the Alberta Government who voted anti-family Bill 10 into law, and followed up with such a dangerous guideline?

If Alberta parents want to avoid such a moment of soul searching after the loss of a child, we, each and every Alberta parent, must unite and reject NDP Minister Eggen's 'Guidelines' outright. In order to protect Alberta students we must demand amendments to Bill 10 Legislation that return parents to their rightful position. Parents - not teachers, schools, bureaucrats or activists - must remain the primary caregivers and decision makers in their children's education.

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