



GSA's: More than peer support and pizza

Parents, we are being duped. We all want safe and caring schools. We want to ensure that all vulnerable students, including sexual and gender minority students, have the support they need.

Bill 24: An Act to Support Gay Straight Alliances, tabled in the legislature Nov. 2, would amend the School Act to strip schools of professional oversight and authority, and leave parents in the dark regarding the needs of their children. The NDP claim this is necessary to ensure children are not “outed” to their own loving parents.

However, the NDP are using our good intentions and loving hearts against us. They are playing a game of bait and switch, convincing us to abdicate the care of our own children, all while ignoring the risks.

This legislation would create a void of care for our children, into which anyone can set up shop, without proper oversight or accountability. Who are these facilitators to whom you are entrusting your children? What qualifications do they have when it comes to counselling kids, as young as five, around struggles with sexuality and gender?

There are numerous reasons parents should be deeply concerned about Bill 24.

To begin with, Bill 24 enforces secrecy, preventing staff from engaging parents in the care of their own children. How can children be safe, or properly cared for, if adult professionals are forbidden to involve

parents regardless of critical factors such as age, special needs, past trauma, or risk of self-harm?

Secondly, parents have been repeatedly reassured sexual content would not be presented in these clubs. Why then does Bill 24 propose to amend the School Act to explicitly exempt GSAs and related activities from the long-standing parental notification and opt-out provision for sexual topics?

This is especially concerning when the government-recommended Alberta GSA Network has previously allowed access to sexually graphic material through community support links intended for K-12 children. Even today, egregious materials such as the “Sex from A-Z Cards” (Google them at your own risk) are being described by some ‘experts’ as appropriate for certain populations of youth.

Another deep concern is that GSAs may be exploited as tools of activism and social change.

The Alberta Teachers’ Association resource GSAs and QSAs in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers describes four types of GSAs. Two of these specifically describe GSAs as tools of activism and social change, where children can, among other things, “initiate schoolwide educational activities and programs (eg, guest speakers, assemblies, pride week activities)” and offer “an anti-oppression educational mandate across intersections of difference.”

Transforming peer support clubs into hotbeds of activism is in direct opposition to the standards of Alberta’s Guide to Education, which states that schools “need to exercise sensitivity to ensure that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed or intimidated for positions that they hold on controversial issues” and that “the school plays a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development.” An activist-style GSA would also be hostile to the foundational principles of unique faith or culturally focused school settings.

No one would deny it is important to offer peer support and care to struggling youth in all schools. However, parents cannot continue to allow themselves to be duped into believing GSAs are merely about pizza and peer support, nor cowered by ‘outing’ rhetoric that presumes them to be risks to their own children.

The reality is that the NDP and their activist friends are using Bill 24 to circumvent parents, offer sexual content without oversight, undermine the professional judgment of school staff, and impose activism through clubs.

None of these have anything to do with safe and caring schools. Therefore, in order to successfully provide welcoming and respectful learning environments for all students, we must insist that Bill 24 be shelved.

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