

# CREATING WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL & SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## Supporting Students to Start a Gay-Straight / Queer-Straight Alliance: A Resource for School Principals

Under Section 16.1 of the School Act, students have a right to establish a voluntary student organization intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. This includes, but is not limited to gay-straight (GSA) or queer-straight alliances (QSA).

As a principal, if students wish to start a gay-straight or queer-straight alliance in your school, you have the responsibility to support them in doing so.

### Secure a liaison

When students voice the desire to gather as a voluntary student organization, they will need a liaison to support their group. There are three options for finding a liaison:

#### 1. Staff or community member

A member of the school or local community volunteers to act as the liaison. Volunteers may include:

- teacher
- support staff
- other school workers such as resource officer, family and community support services worker
- teacher from nearby school
- other affiliated adult
- volunteer from the local community

Ensure non-certificated liaisons are in compliance with the school authority's policy for non-certificated supervisors. The principal supports the volunteer liaison as needed or required.

#### 2. Principal

The principal may act as the liaison if a staff or community member volunteer cannot be found.

#### 3. Appointed by the Minister of Education

The following steps must be taken in order to have the Minister appoint a liaison.

- The principal informs the school authority.
- The principal informs the Minister by submitting a completed Liaison Appointment Form, which can be found at [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca). (Note: Some form of compensation for the liaison may be required).
- The Minister will appoint a responsible adult to be the liaison. The search and selection process to identify a liaison may take 2–8 weeks depending on the location and time required for document verification.
- The Alberta Teachers' Association will coordinate an initial meeting between the appointed liaison and the principal. They will also assist with identifying a mentor to support the liaison.
- The principal acts as an intermediary for the liaison
  - establishes location for meetings
  - introduces to students/staff
  - facilitates school-wide events as needed
- If a school or local community member subsequently volunteers, the principal informs the appointed liaison and the Minister.
- The principal reviews the process each September to determine if an appointed liaison is still required and notifies the Minister.
- If a school or local community member volunteers once a liaison has been appointed, the liaison will remain for a transition period with the new liaison as a period of acclimatization for the group members.

## Naming the group

At the first meeting, the students and liaison may discuss what they would like to name the group. Students have the right to choose a respectful and inclusive name, including “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance,” after consulting with the principal.

## Supporting the Appointed Liaison

The liaison will work with the principal to coordinate the program in the school. This involves setting meeting times that respect student needs and availabilities. The principal may need to provide extra supervision and support for events.