

## Bill 24 Fact Sheet & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### Bill 24: *An Act to Protect Gay-Straight Alliances*

#### What is Bill 24?

Bill 24 has been introduced to support students who create or join gay-straight alliances (GSAs) or queer-straight alliances (QSAs) at their schools.

#### Why is Bill 24 being introduced?

Every student deserves a welcoming, caring and safe place to learn.

It will clarify school authority roles and responsibilities around GSAs and QSAs.

Provide additional clarity around the establishment of GSAs or QSAs at the school level.

#### Why is Bill 24 important?

To promote welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments for all students.

GSAs/QSAs help celebrate the uniqueness and importance of diversity and inclusiveness and promote equality for all.

#### Why are GSAs Important?

To help students overcome feelings of isolation and alienation that are a result of homophobic and transphobic **bullying**.

As peer support networks, GSAs/QSAs provide a place to create a sense of **belonging**.

Research tells us that LGBTQ students are more likely to feel **safe** in schools with GSAs/QSAs.

When students feel valued and accepted for who they are, it can positively impact **academic performance** in school.

#### What are GSAs?

A GSA/QSA is run by students and supported by school staff and is grounded in the principles of promoting:

- equity for sexual and gender minority students
- safe, caring and inclusive spaces for all students
- healthy, respectful environments to prevent or eliminate bullying and discrimination

Each one is different and should be driven by the needs and goals of each school community and will change based on grade level.

Bullying behaviours exist at all grade levels - and finding age-appropriate ways to address them is key to minimizing them.

Most GSA/QSA meetings involve discussions about making schools more inclusive and safer for all students.

## **Why amend the School Act?**

A review of policies identified gaps in existing legislation that need to be addressed in order to provide clarity to school authorities, students, and school communities.

Affirm the rights of students and staff as provided for in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Privacy legislation guides privacy and disclosure practices to ensure that personal information is handled appropriately. School authorities are subject to privacy provisions under either the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)* or the *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)*.

## **How will Bill 24 amend the School Act?**

*There are four key areas:*

1. Creating Policies to Provide a Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environment
2. Ensuring School Authorities have Compliant Policies
3. Protecting Student Privacy
4. Clarifying Practices for the Establishment of Student Organizations

*Proposed amendments would:*

- Require all publicly funded schools to create welcoming, caring and respectful policies and make them publicly available.
- Strengthen the minister's ability to ensure every school complies with the law.
- Protect the privacy of students that join a GSA or QSA.
- Ensure principals help students create a GSA or QSA in a timely manner.

## **What happens next?**

If passed, the amendments would come into force by April 1, 2018. School authorities will have until June 30, 2018 to make their safe and caring policies publicly available.

## **What if I have specific questions or concerns about Bill 24?**

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Paul Lamoureux, Executive Director, Field Services, Alberta Education at: 780-427-6272 or [SafeCaring@gov.ab.ca](mailto:SafeCaring@gov.ab.ca).

## **Does ASCA have member policy regarding GSAs?**

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) supports safe and caring schools and promotes student wellbeing in learning environments.

School Councils are an ideal forum for collaborative conversations in the school community, with respect to student safety, wellbeing and learning success.

*ASCA Overarching Advocacy Policy Statements relevant to Bill 24:*

**Student Health and Safety**

ASCA supports students and their families knowing that their school community is a safe, secure and caring place to be and learn. ASCA believes:

- that all schools should implement a safe and caring school program that is collaboratively developed and regularly assessed by students, parents, teachers, administration and school councils to suit the unique and inclusive needs of the school community

**School Councils, School Community, Parental Involvement**

ASCA supports the formation, development and growth of an effective school council in every public and charter school in the province and believes a collaborative partnership of parents, teachers, administrators, students and others is essential to student learning success.

**Learning Opportunities**

ASCA supports an ECS-12 education system that allows for success for every student.