

# 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 voluntary student organizations 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 alliances (GSAs) or queer-straight alliances (QSAs).

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

### Secure a Volunteer or Minister Appointed Liaison

There are three options for finding a liaison to support the student group.

#### 1. Staff or community member volunteer

A member of the school or local community may volunteer. Volunteers may include:

- teacher from staff
- 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\*

Principal supports the volunteer as needed or required.

\*Ensure non-certificated advisors are in compliance with the school authority's policy for non-certificated supervisors.

#### 2. Designation

Principal acts as the liaison or designates a staff member to do so.

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

The following steps must be taken for the Minister to appoint a liaison.

- Principal informs the school board.
- Principal informs the Minister by submitting a completed [Liaison Appointment Form](#), which can be found on Alberta Education's [Gay-Straight Alliances](#) webpage.  
(Note: Some form of compensation for the liaison may be required.)
- Ministry conducts a search process to find a responsible adult to be the liaison. The search process includes background and reference checks and may take 2-8 weeks depending on the location and time required for document verification.
- Minister or Minister's delegate communicates the appointed liaison's name and contact information to the principal and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA).
- ATA coordinates an initial meeting between the appointed liaison and the principal as well as assists the appointed liaison by providing informational resources and identifying a mentor.
- Principal acts as an intermediary for the appointed liaison by:
  - establishing location for meetings
  - introducing liaison to students and staff
  - providing support for events

## ***Appointed by the Minister of Education cont.***

If a school or community member volunteers after the Minister has appointed a liaison, the following steps should be taken.

- Principal informs the appointed liaison and the Minister that the services of the appointed liaison are no longer needed.
- Appointed liaison remains for a transition period with the volunteer to ensure an acclimatization period for the group members

Principal reviews process each September to determine if an appointed liaison is still required. If so, the principal completes the [Liaison Appointment Form](#), which can be found on Alberta Education's [Gay-Straight Alliances](#) webpage.

## **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.”

## **Supporting the Liaison**

The volunteer or appointed liaison will work with the principal to coordinate the student organization in the school. This involves setting meeting times that respect student needs and availability. The principal may need to provide extra support for school events.