

Review

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Posted Date: 25 May 2026

doi: 10.20944/preprints202605.1590.v1

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Review

# Equity at the Crossroads: A Comparative Analysis of EDI and Sexual Health Policies in Canada's Prairie Provinces and School Boards

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## Abstract

**Background:** Canada's Prairie Provinces have become a focal point for contentious educational policy debates. Saskatchewan's Bill 137 (2023) and Alberta's Education Amendment Act 2024 (Bill 27) enacted sweeping restrictions on sexual health education and 2SLGBTQ+ student identity recognition, framed as 'parental rights.' Manitoba maintains a rights-affirming, inclusive framework grounded in the Public Schools Act. This policy divergence has direct implications for student mental health, sexual health literacy, and equity. **Methods:** We conducted a systematic document search of official government websites of three Prairie Provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) and four major school boards selected by size and demographic diversity: Calgary Board of Education (CBE), Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB), Regina Public Schools (RPS), and Winnipeg School Division (WSD). Searches were conducted in May 2026. The Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework guided structured content analysis across three categories: (1) 2SLGBTQ+ recognition and affirming policy; (2) sexual health accessibility provisions; and (3) culturally responsive and EDI-consistent care. Documents were coded as 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Not Reported' for each sub-category. **Results:** The search yielded 56 documents; 36 met inclusion criteria (20 provincial, 16 school board). Alberta (n=5) and Saskatchewan (n=6) provincial documents were dominated by restrictive legislation: Bill 27 shifts sexual health education to an opt-in model with ministerial vetting of all SOGI materials; Bill 137 bans third-party sexual health educators entirely and mandates parental consent for pronoun use, pre-emptively invoking the notwithstanding clause. Manitoba's nine provincial documents (n=9) reflect an affirmative legislative framework: 100% explicitly affirm 2SLGBTQ+ students, 100% cite human rights frameworks, and 78% maintain community health partnerships. At the school board level, EDI-consistent provisions were strongest in EPSB (n=5) and WSD (n=4), which have standalone SOGIE policies and active equity frameworks. CBE (n=4) retains affirming guidelines while implementing provincial opt-in requirements. RPS (n=3) maintains AP 353 on Gender and Sexual Diversity. Only two provincial documents (11%) both from Manitoba, explicitly referenced sexual health community partnerships; zero Alberta or Saskatchewan provincial documents did so post-2023. **Conclusions:** The structural divergence between provinces is stark. Alberta and Saskatchewan policies render 2SLGBTQ+ students structurally vulnerable through opt-in exclusion, compelled parental disclosure, and elimination of community health expertise from classrooms. Manitoba's model demonstrates that EDI-consistent, rights-affirming sexual health policy is legislatively achievable. Urgent systemic reform is required to restore affirming care, reinstate community partnerships, and reverse opt-in models that deny students access to evidence-based sexual health education.

**Keywords:** EDI; sexual health education; Prairie Provinces; school boards; parental rights; 2SLGBTQ+; Bill 137; Bill 27; Manitoba; Alberta; Saskatchewan; gender identity; policy analysis; structural stigma; IBPA

## 1. Introduction

Over the past three years, Canada's Prairie Provinces have become a focal point for some of the most consequential educational policy debates in the country. Framed primarily around the concept of 'parental rights,' provincial governments in Saskatchewan and Alberta have enacted sweeping legislative changes that restrict the delivery of sexual health education, limit the recognition of 2SLGBTQ+ student identities in schools, and centralise ministerial control over curriculum content related to gender and sexuality [1,6]. These measures stand in sharp contrast to established equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) frameworks that have been progressively embedded in Canadian education policy over the past two decades [15].

The significance of this policy shift extends beyond procedural educational governance. For 2SLGBTQ+ youth, a population identified by Statistics Canada and major health bodies as experiencing markedly elevated rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and social marginalisation, the school environment constitutes one of the few institutional spaces offering potential safety, affirming social relationships, and access to medically accurate sexual health information [19,20]. Legislative changes that condition this access on parental consent, or that require ministerial approval of instructional material touching gender or sexuality, may have life-altering consequences for vulnerable young people.

Manitoba occupies a distinctly different policy position [12–15]. Operating under a rights-based, inclusive framework anchored in the Public Schools Act and supported by collaborative resources developed in partnership with EGALÉ Canada, Manitoba's approach more closely aligns with EDI principles and with the recommendations of paediatric, psychiatric, and human rights bodies. This inter-provincial divergence offers a rare natural policy comparison, enabling researchers and practitioners to examine what EDI-consistent versus EDI-inconsistent frameworks look like in practice.

This paper situates itself at the intersection of educational policy analysis, public health, and critical equity studies. It draws upon the Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework [22] to guide systematic cross-jurisdictional analysis of 36 verified policy documents retrieved through a systematic web-based search of official government and school board sources.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Educational Policy

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as a framework in educational settings draws from critical race theory, feminist and queer theory, disability studies, and intersectionality [22]. At its core, EDI recognises that formal equality of access to education is insufficient if structural conditions including curriculum content, pedagogical norms, disciplinary practices, and institutional culture; systematically disadvantage students based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. In the Canadian context, EDI frameworks gained significant legislative traction through the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly sections 7 (right to life, liberty, and security), 15 (equality rights), and 28 (gender equality). The inclusion of sexual orientation and gender expression as protected grounds under provincial human rights legislation, Alberta (2009), Saskatchewan (2014), and Manitoba (earlier) created a legal basis for affirmative EDI obligations in school settings.

### 2.2. The 'Parental Rights' Frame and Its Policy Implications

The legislative changes in Alberta and Saskatchewan have been advanced under the rhetorical frame of 'parental rights' the proposition that parents hold a primary and overriding interest in determining the information to which their children are exposed, particularly regarding sexuality and gender identity [1,6]. Policy scholars have noted the internal tensions within this frame when applied to matters of student identity. Unlike curricular content decisions, which may reasonably be

subject to parental input; a student's gender identity is not a subject of instruction but rather a fundamental aspect of personhood. Policies requiring parental consent before a student may use a self-determined name or pronoun conflate content governance with identity surveillance, a category confusion with significant human rights implications. Furthermore, the parental rights frame implicitly assumes congruence between parental interests and student interests an assumption that empirical research consistently challenges in the case of 2SLGBTQ+ youth, for whom non-affirming family environments represent one of the principal risk factors for mental health crises, substance use, and homelessness [19,20].

### 2.3. Structural Stigma and Health Equity

Hatzenbuehler's structural stigma framework provides a foundational lens for analysing the health consequences of the provincial policies under study [23,24]. Structural stigma refers to conditions in societal institutions laws, policies, cultural norms that restrict the opportunities, resources, and well-being of stigmatised groups. Research has demonstrated that higher levels of structural stigma directed at 2SLGBTQ+ populations are associated with elevated rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and reduced school engagement among youth [23,24]. Applied to Prairie Province policies, the structural stigma framework predicts that policies signalling governmental disapproval of 2SLGBTQ+ identities through mandatory parental disclosure requirements, opt-in models, and ministerial approval processes will produce measurable harms to the mental health and educational outcomes of affected students, even where the policies are ostensibly directed at parental transparency rather than anti-LGBTQ+ animus.

## 3. Methods and Materials

### 3.1. Design and Framework

We conducted a systematic comparative policy analysis of documents from provincial governments and selected school boards. The Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework by Hankivsky et al. [22] guided this analysis, examining two adapted descriptive research questions: (1) 'To what extent do current provincial and school board policy documents recognise and address 2SLGBTQ+ student needs in relation to sexual health and gender identity?'; and (2) 'What inequities exist in policies about student access to sexual health education and gender-affirming supports across the Prairie Provinces?'

### 3.2. Search Strategy and Data Sources

We conducted a systematic search of the official websites of three provincial governments (Alberta: alberta.ca and open.alberta.ca; Saskatchewan: saskatchewan.ca; Manitoba: gov.mb.ca and edu.gov.mb.ca) and four major school boards selected based on size and the high demographic representation of 2SLGBTQ+-relevant policy environments: Calgary Board of Education (cbe.ab.ca), Edmonton Public Schools (epsb.ca), Regina Public Schools (reginapublicschools.ca), and Winnipeg School Division (winnipegdsd.ca). The search was conducted in May 2026.

The search strategy employed a combination of key terms: ['sexual health education' OR 'gender identity policy' OR 'parental rights education' OR '2SLGBTQ+ students' OR 'equity and inclusion' OR 'Bill 27' OR 'Bill 137' OR 'GSA' OR 'safe and caring'] AND ['school boards' OR 'school policy' OR 'curriculum' OR 'student wellbeing' OR 'gender diversity']. Search terms were applied to each website's search function and policy index pages, focusing on policy titles and summaries. Documents were included irrespective of publication date, provided they met inclusion criteria.

### 3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

We included: (a) official provincial policies, legislative documents, ministerial directives, and regulatory frameworks; (b) official school board policies, administrative regulations, and board-

approved procedures; (c) government guidance documents and frameworks on sexual health education, gender identity, and EDI in schools. We excluded: purely operational communications, media releases without policy content, research reports by non-governmental organisations, and documents unrelated to K-12 school-based sexual health, gender identity, or EDI.

### 3.4. Screening, Selection, and Data Extraction

The initial search yielded 56 documents across all seven jurisdictions. The lead researcher applied inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in 36 documents meeting inclusion criteria: 20 provincial (Alberta n=5; Saskatchewan n=6; Manitoba n=9) and 16 school board (CBE n=4; EPSB n=5; RPS n=3; WSD n=4). Twenty documents were excluded including out-of-scope operational materials, communications pieces, and research reports produced by non-governmental bodies. Data extracted included: document title; URL and retrieval date; jurisdiction; acknowledgment of 2SLGBTQ+ student needs; sexual health accessibility provisions; EDI and culturally responsive care provisions; and significant illustrative policy language. Sub-codes were categorised as 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Not Reported' and tallied across jurisdictions.

Table 1 presents the search yield and document distribution by jurisdiction. Table 2 lists all 36 included documents with verified URLs.

**Table 1.** Systematic Search Yield and Included Documents by Jurisdiction (May 2026).

Jurisdiction	Documents Retrieved	Excluded	Included (n)	Policy Focus
Provincial Level				
Alberta	8	3	5	Bill 27/Educ. Amendment Act 2024; inclusive ed; GSA; safe & caring; mental health
Saskatchewan	9	3	6	Bill 137/Parents' Bill of Rights; GSD resource; wellness; equity plan; provincial ed plan
Manitoba	14	5	9	Transgender support; Safe & Caring; MYGSA; Code of Conduct; 2SLGBTQIA+ engagement; inclusive ed
Provincial Subtotal	31	11	20	
School Board Level				
Calgary Board of Education (CBE)	6	2	4	2SLGBTQ safe & caring; SOGI guidelines; health

Jurisdiction	Documents Retrieved	Excluded	Included (n)	Policy Focus
				& wellness framework; anti-racism & equity
Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB)	8	3	5	SOGIE policy (HFA.BP/AR); anti-racism plan; safe caring schools; inclusive ed; student wellness
Regina Public Schools (RPS)	5	2	3	AP 353 Students & GSD; AP 110 EDI; GSA / bullying prevention resources
Winnipeg School Division (WSD)	6	2	4	Trans & Gender Diverse policy; Equity & Diversity; Equity Progress Report 2025; Everyone Welcome
School Board Subtotal	25	9	16	
TOTAL	56	20	36	

Note. All documents retrieved from official government and school board websites. Excluded documents comprised operational communications, media releases without policy content, non-governmental research reports, and post-secondary materials.

**Table 2.** Complete List of Included Policy Documents with Verified Sources (N=36).

#	Document Title and Source	Jurisdiction	Year
1	Government of Alberta. Education Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 27) – Supporting Alberta Students and Families. <a href="https://alberta.ca/supporting-alberta-students-and-families">alberta.ca/supporting-alberta-students-and-families</a>	Alberta (Prov.)	2024
2	Government of Alberta. Inclusive Education. <a href="https://alberta.ca/inclusive-education">alberta.ca/inclusive-education</a>	Alberta (Prov.)	2021
3	Government of Alberta. Safe and Caring Schools (whole-school approach, GSA policy). <a href="https://alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools">alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools</a>	Alberta (Prov.)	2024
4	Government of Alberta. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA/QSA). <a href="https://alberta.ca/gay-straight-alliances">alberta.ca/gay-straight-alliances</a>	Alberta (Prov.)	2024
5	Government of Alberta. Mental Health in Schools (Pilot; Working Together resource). <a href="https://alberta.ca/mental-health-in-schools">alberta.ca/mental-health-in-schools</a>	Alberta (Prov.)	2025

#	Document Title and Source	Jurisdiction	Year
6	Government of Saskatchewan. Education (Parents' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2023 (Bill 137). <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../parents-bill-of-rights-introduced-in-legislature">saskatchewan.ca/.../parents-bill-of-rights-introduced-in-legislature</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2023
7	Government of Saskatchewan. Parental Inclusion and Consent Policy Announcement (Aug 22, 2023). <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../education-minister-announces-new-parental-inclusion-and-consent-policies">saskatchewan.ca/.../education-minister-announces-new-parental-inclusion-and-consent-policies</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2023
8	Government of Saskatchewan. Gender and Sexual Diversity – Deepening the Discussion. <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../gender-and-sexual-diversity">saskatchewan.ca/.../gender-and-sexual-diversity</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2023
9	Government of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy – Fostering Inclusivity and Respect. <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../fostering-inclusivity-and-respect">saskatchewan.ca/.../fostering-inclusivity-and-respect</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2024
10	Government of Saskatchewan. Student Wellness and Well-being hub (Comprehensive School Community Health). <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../student-wellness-and-wellbeing">saskatchewan.ca/.../student-wellness-and-wellbeing</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2025
11	Government of Saskatchewan. Mental Health Capacity Building Expansion announcement. <a href="https://saskatchewan.ca/.../expansion-of-mental-health-capacity-building-program">saskatchewan.ca/.../expansion-of-mental-health-capacity-building-program</a>	Saskatchewan (Prov.)	2025
12	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Manitoba Schools (+ FAQ). <a href="https://edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/transgender/index.html">edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/transgender/index.html</a>	Manitoba (Prov.)	2017/updated
13	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Safe and Caring Schools – Resource for Equity and Inclusion (MB MYGSA, co-developed with EGALE Canada). <a href="https://edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html">edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html</a>	Manitoba (Prov.)	2014/updated
14	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Safe and Caring Schools: Provincial Code of Conduct. <a href="https://edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/pdf/code_conduct.pdf">edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/pdf/code_conduct.pdf</a>	Manitoba (Prov.)	2024
15	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Respect for Human Diversity Policies (Public Schools Act framework). <a href="https://edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/human_diversity/document.pdf">edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/human_diversity/document.pdf</a>	Manitoba (Prov.)	2014
16	Government of Manitoba. 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Engagement Survey / Service Improvement (EngageMB). <a href="https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=63923">news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=63923</a>	Manitoba (Prov.)	2024

#	Document Title and Source	Jurisdiction	Year
17	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Safe and Caring Schools: Policy Directive – Enhancing Proactive Supports (seclusion/attendance). edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html	Manitoba (Prov.)	2022
18	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. Guidelines for Supporting and Affirming Trans and Gender Diverse Students. edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/transgender/guidelines.pdf	Manitoba (Prov.)	2023
19	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. GSA Guide – Safe and Caring Schools Resource. edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/mygsa/gsa_guide.pdf	Manitoba (Prov.)	2014
20	Government of Manitoba / MEECL. LGBTQ+ Community Resources List. edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/mygsa/lgbtq_resources.pdf	Manitoba (Prov.)	2014
21	Calgary Board of Education. Creating Safe & Caring Environments for all 2SLGBTQ+ Youth. cbe.ab.ca/.../creating-safe-and-caring-environments-for-all-lbgtq-youth	CBE (School Board)	2025
22	Calgary Board of Education. Creating Conditions to Thrive – Guidelines for Attending to Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation. cbe.ab.ca (PDF)	CBE (School Board)	2023
23	Calgary Board of Education. Health & Wellness in School – Student Well-Being Framework. cbe.ab.ca/.../health-and-wellness-in-school	CBE (School Board)	2025
24	Calgary Board of Education. FAQ for Parents/Guardians/Staff – Guidelines for 2SLGBTQ+ Students. cbe.ab.ca (PDF)	CBE (School Board)	2025
25	Edmonton Public Schools. HFA.BP Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression (Board Policy). epsb.ca/ourdistrict/policy/h/hfa-bp/	EPSB (School Board)	2024
26	Edmonton Public Schools. HFA.AR Administrative Regulation – SOGIE. epsb.ca/ourdistrict/policy/h/hfa-ar/	EPSB (School Board)	2024
27	Edmonton Public Schools. Anti-Racism, Reconciliation and Equity Action Plan. epsb.ca/ourdistrict/topics/	EPSB (School Board)	2023
28	Edmonton Public Schools. HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity (Board Policy). epsb.ca/ourdistrict/policy/h/ (policy index)	EPSB (School Board)	2022

#	Document Title and Source	Jurisdiction	Year
29	Edmonton Public Schools. AE.BP / AE.BB.BP – Welcoming, Inclusive Safe/Healthy Environments; Wellness of Students and Staff. epsb.ca (policy index)	EPSB (School Board)	2023
30	Regina Public Schools. AP 353 – Students and Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD). reginapublicschools.ca/administrative_procedures (updated Jun/25)	RPS (School Board)	2022/2025
31	Regina Public Schools. AP 110 – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. reginapublicschools.ca/administrative_procedures	RPS (School Board)	2022
32	Regina Public Schools. GSA and Bullying Prevention Resources (including mental health community supports). reginapublicschools.ca/gsa + reginapublicschools.ca/mental_health_supports	RPS (School Board)	2023
33	Winnipeg School Division. Safe and Caring – Trans and Gender Diverse Students and Staff Policy (IGABB). winniepegsd.ca (PDF)	WSD (School Board)	2016
34	Winnipeg School Division. Equity & Diversity (Inclusion Across the Rainbow; Everyone Welcome). winniepegsd.ca/page/9548/equity-diversity + winniepegsd.ca/everyone-welcome	WSD (School Board)	2025
35	Winnipeg School Division. Equity Progress Report June 2025. media.winniepegsd.ca (PDF)	WSD (School Board)	2025
36	Winnipeg School Division. Inclusive Education framework. winniepegsd.ca/inclusive-education	WSD (School Board)	2025

Note. All sources verified via direct web search and retrieval, May 2026. URLs abbreviated for space; full URLs available from the corresponding author. Documents marked with an asterisk (\*) in Table 4 reflect post-2023 legislative restrictions on third-party partnerships.

## 4. Legislative and Policy Analysis: Province by Province

### 4.1. Saskatchewan: The Parents' Bill of Rights (Bill 137, 2023)

#### 4.1.1. Legislative History and Key Provisions

Saskatchewan's legislative trajectory began in August 2023 when Education Minister Dustin Duncan announced a package of administrative policies (Doc.7) prohibiting the participation of third-party organisations in sexual health education, requiring parental notification of sexual health curriculum, and mandating parental consent for students under 16 to use preferred gender-related names or pronouns. These policies prompted an immediate constitutional challenge by the UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity and EGALE Canada. On September 19, 2023, Court of King's Bench Justice Michael Megaw granted an injunction, finding the policies risked causing 'irreparable harm.'

Rather than awaiting a full hearing, Premier Scott Moe recalled the legislature in emergency session. Bill 137, the Education (Parents' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2023 (Doc.6) was introduced October 10 and passed October 20, 2023. Crucially, the government invoked section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (notwithstanding clause), as well as equivalent provisions of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, to shield the legislation from judicial review preemptively. As of May 2026, Bill 137 mandates: parental consent before students under 16 may use a different gender-related name or pronoun; advance parental notice for sexual health education; a permanent ban on third-party organisations from providing sexual health education in classrooms; and a requirement for teachers to redirect student questions about gender or sexuality to their families.

#### 4.1.2. EDI Implications

The ban on third-party sexual health educators (Doc.6,7) has severed over a decade of collaboration between school divisions and community organisations such as UR Pride, OUTSaskatoon, Saskatoon Sexual Health, Planned Parenthood Regina, and the Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre, partnerships that had been funded by Ministry of Education grants and shown through evaluation to increase student knowledge, safety, and inclusion. The pronoun and name consent requirement constitute a form of compelled disclosure ('outing') for students whose gender identity is unknown to or unsupported by parents. Research consistently identifies family non-acceptance as a primary risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes in trans and gender-diverse youth [19,20,23].

The Saskatchewan government's Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity resource (Doc.8) remains on the provincial website, creating a marked inconsistency: professional learning encouraging staff to support gender and sexually diverse students coexists with legislation that structurally prevents them from doing so. The provincial Children and Youth Strategy (Doc.9,10) references 'fostering inclusivity and respect' and student wellness without specifically addressing the impact of Bill 137 on 2SLGBTQ+ student safety.

### 4.2. Alberta: The Education Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 27)

#### 4.2.1. Legislative History and Key Provisions

Alberta's policy evolution followed a similar trajectory, proceeding through more extended stakeholder engagement without invoking the notwithstanding clause. Premier Danielle Smith announced sweeping proposed changes on January 31, 2024. Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024 (Doc.1) received Royal Assent December 5, 2024, with the majority of SOGI-related provisions coming into force September 1, 2025. As confirmed by the official alberta.ca legislation page (Doc.1), the Act requires: parental notification and consent for students under 16 requesting preferred gender-related names or pronouns (notification only for ages 16-17); a counselling provision before notification where psychological harm is reasonably expected; an opt-in model (replacing opt-out) for all instruction dealing primarily and explicitly with gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality; ministerial approval of all learning and teaching resources dealing with these topics; and ministerial approval of all external presenters on these topics.

#### 4.2.2. School Board and Professional Responses

Alberta's other provincial policies (Doc.2-5) continue to reflect an inclusive education philosophy. The Inclusive Education framework (Doc.2) affirms that all students regardless of 'gender, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation' must have access to meaningful learning. The Safe and Caring Schools policy (Doc.3) and GSA framework (Doc.4) remain in force, requiring schools to support student-led GSAs under Education Act s.35.1. The Mental Health in Schools resource (Doc.5) promotes universal mental health supports. However, none of these documents has been updated to address the specific implications of Bill 27 for 2SLGBTQ+ student

mental health and sexual health access. The EPSB Board of Trustees formally noted that the Division's strong SOGIE policy (Doc.25,26) remains in place 'until further notice' and criticized the absence of school board consultation ahead of Bill 27's announcement.

#### 4.2.3. EDI Implications

The shift from opt-out to opt-in effectively reverses the default from inclusion to exclusion. School staff are required to assume all students are excluded from any form of sexual health education including lessons on consent, puberty, STI prevention, and healthy relationships until explicit parental authorisation is received. Because the opt-in requirement applies to all 'human sexuality' content including consent education beginning as early as Grade 1, the exclusion of students from consent education constitutes a measurable public health risk. The ministerial vetting process for resources introduces an inherently political filter for scientifically grounded health content.

#### 4.3. Manitoba: A Rights-Affirming, Inclusive Framework

Manitoba's approach to EDI and sexual health education rests on a fundamentally different legislative and philosophical foundation. The Public Schools Act requires every school board to establish a written 'Respect for Human Diversity' policy under the Human Rights Code [15]. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (MEECL) has operationalised this through a comprehensive suite of nine documents included in this review (Doc.12-20). These include: Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Manitoba Schools (Doc.12), co-developed with EGALE Canada; Safe and Caring Schools A Resource for Equity and Inclusion (Doc.13); the Safe and Caring Schools Provincial Code of Conduct (Doc.14) which explicitly requires staff to protect students' gender identity and sexual orientation from unauthorised disclosure; the Respect for Human Diversity Policies framework (Doc.15); updated Guidelines for Supporting and Affirming Trans and Gender Diverse Students (Doc.18); and the GSA Guide (Doc.19) and LGBTQ+ Community Resources list (Doc.20). The 2024 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Engagement process (Doc.16) demonstrates active government commitment to service improvement.

In contrast to Saskatchewan and Alberta, Manitoba's provincial policies actively enable and sustain community health partnerships (Doc.13,20). The MEECL explicitly references partnerships with organisations including the Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC), the Rainbow Resource Centre, and 2-Spirited People of Manitoba. The opt-out model in which families who choose to withdraw their children bear responsibility for alternative provision preserves access for the majority of students, including those in families where discussion of sexual health may be difficult, stigmatised, or unavailable.

**Table 3.** Comparative Policy Summary Across Prairie Provinces (as of May 2026, N=36 Documents).

Policy Dimension	Saskatchewan (Bill 137, Doc.6-7)	Alberta (Bill 27, Doc.1-5)	Manitoba (Doc.12-20)
Pronoun / Name Consent	Parental consent required (<16); no codified safety exception; notwithstanding clause invoked [6]	Parental consent required (<16); notification only (16-17); counselling provision before notification [1]	No mandatory parental consent; staff required to protect student privacy; discretion required [12,14]
Sexual Health Education Model	Parental notification required; opt-out for	Opt-in model (changed from opt-	Opt-out model; family responsible for

Policy Dimension	Saskatchewan (Bill 137, Doc.6-7)	Alberta (Bill 27, Doc.1-5)	Manitoba (Doc.12-20)
	general curriculum; note: third-party ban enacted Aug 2023 [7]	out Sept 2025); ministerial vetting required for all SOGI resources and presenters [1]	alternative provision if withdrawn; community partnerships maintained [13,15]
Third-Party Sexual Health Educators	Completely banned (Aug 2023 directive, codified in Bill 137) [6,7]	Permitted only with prior ministerial approval; significant administrative barriers introduced [1]	Active partnerships maintained (e.g., SERC, Rainbow Resource Centre) [13,20]
GSA/Gender-Sexuality Alliances	Structurally threatened: third-party ban + pronoun consent provisions limit GSA safety and function [6]	Legally protected under Education Act s.35.1; SOGI presentations within GSAs require ministerial approval [3,4]	Legally mandated; schools must accommodate student-led diversity organisations under Public Schools Act [13,15]
Charter/Human Rights Compliance	Notwithstanding clause (Charter ss.7,15 and SK Human Rights Code) invoked pre-emptively [6]	No notwithstanding clause; legal challenges filed; legislation did not receive pre-emptive Charter protection [1]	Explicitly grounded in MB Human Rights Code and Canadian Charter; no notwithstanding invocations [12,14,15]
EDI Policy Alignment	Significantly inconsistent: removes protections, bans community partners, imposes outing risk for 2SLGBTQ+ students [6-8]	Substantially inconsistent: opt-in model and ministerial vetting structurally exclude and stigmatise [1]	Broadly consistent: affirmative obligations, rights-affirming philosophy, inclusive community partnerships [12-15]
School Board Autonomy	Significantly curtailed: province-	Curtailed: boards must develop	Maintained: school divisions develop own

Policy Dimension	Saskatchewan (Bill 137, Doc.6-7)	Alberta (Bill 27, Doc.1-5)	Manitoba (Doc.12-20)
	wide directives override board discretion; no prior consultation [6,7]	compliant policies by Sept 2025; ASBA, ATA, ASCA publicly opposed [1]	Respect for Human Diversity policies within legislative framework [15]

Note. Document numbers in brackets refer to the verified document list in Table 2. \*Bill 137 invoked the notwithstanding clause; Bill 27 did not.

## 5. Results: EDI and Sexual Health Provision Analysis

### 5.1. Recognition of 2SLGBTQ+ Student Needs

Among the 20 provincial documents, explicit recognition of 2SLGBTQ+ student needs was highly variable by province. All nine Manitoba provincial documents (100%) explicitly affirm 2SLGBTQ+ students and their right to gender-affirming supports [12–20]. In stark contrast, Alberta's five provincial documents offer only partial recognition: while the Inclusive Education framework (Doc.2), Safe and Caring Schools (Doc.3), and GSA policy (Doc.4) affirm 2SLGBTQ+ student rights, the centrepiece legislation Bill 27 (Doc.1) structurally conditions these rights on parental consent and ministerial approval, creating a fundamental internal contradiction. Among Saskatchewan's six provincial documents, only the Deepening the Discussion resource (Doc.8) explicitly affirms gender and sexual diversity; Bill 137 (Doc.6) and its associated ministerial announcement (Doc.7) explicitly restrict such affirmation by requiring parental gatekeeping.

All 16 school board documents (100%) affirmed 2SLGBTQ+ student needs to varying degrees. EPSB (Doc.25,26) and WSD (Doc.33,34) demonstrate the most comprehensive, standalone policies. CBE (Doc.21-24) and RPS (Doc.30-32) maintain affirming frameworks while navigating conflicting provincial legislation.

### 5.2. Sexual Health Accessibility Provisions

All five Alberta provincial documents reference sexual health education provisions; however, Bill 27 (Doc.1) transforms the default from universal access to conditional, opt-in access. The remaining Alberta provincial documents predating Bill 27 or framed broadly do not address the implications of this shift for 2SLGBTQ+ students specifically. All six Saskatchewan provincial documents reference sexual health; however, the legislative framework (Doc.6,7) has eliminated third-party delivery of sexual health content entirely, dramatically narrowing the scope and quality of available instruction. Manitoba's nine provincial documents consistently reflect a comprehensive, opt-out model that treats sexual health education as a default entitlement rather than a conditional privilege [12–15].

At the school board level, the opt-in requirement has been implemented in CBE schools (evidenced by school-level communications requiring written parental consent before any SOGI-related instruction), while EPSB has publicly stated its SOGIE policy remains in force pending further clarity. RPS and WSD both maintain proactive sexual health and gender diversity supports [30–36].

### 5.3. Culturally Responsive and EDI-Consistent Care

Community and third-party partnerships for sexual health were entirely absent from Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial policy documents post-2023. Alberta's Bill 27 (Doc.1) requires ministerial approval for any external presenter on SOGI topics, creating a prohibitive administrative barrier. Saskatchewan's Bill 137 (Doc.6,7) bans third-party sexual health educators categorically. By contrast, seven of nine Manitoba provincial documents (78%) reference active community health

partnerships (Doc.13,15,16,18,19,20), with specific partners named including SERC, the Rainbow Resource Centre, and 2-Spirited People of Manitoba.

Gender-affirming identity supports were codified in 100% of Manitoba provincial documents and 100% of EPSB, CBE, RPS, and WSD school board documents. Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial documents showed this in only 20% and 0% of documents respectively post-2023 legislation. Staff EDI/cultural competency training was referenced in 67% of Manitoba provincial documents versus 40% and 33% of Alberta and Saskatchewan documents respectively. Human rights frameworks were cited in 100% of Manitoba documents and 100% of all four school board documents, compared to 60% and 33% of Alberta and Saskatchewan documents respectively.

Table 4 and 4b present EDI and sexual health provisions coded across all seven jurisdictions.

**Table 4.** EDI and Sexual Health Provisions by Jurisdiction — Provincial and CBE/EPSB (N=36).

EDI/Sexual Health Sub-Category	AB Prov. n=5	SK Prov. n=6	MB Prov. n=9	CBE n=4	EPSB n=5
Explicit 2SLGBTQ+ affirmation / recognition in student supports	2 (40%)	2 (33%)	9 (100%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)
Sexual health education policy present	5 (100%)	5 (83%)	6 (67%)	4 (100%)	4 (80%)
Community / third-party partnerships for sexual health maintained	0 (0%)*	0 (0%)*	7 (78%)	2 (50%)	3 (60%)
Opt-out model preserved (vs. opt-in or notification-only)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	9 (100%)	N/A	N/A
Affirming gender identity supports codified (pronoun use, preferred name, locker rooms)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	9 (100%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)
Cultural competency / EDI staff training mandated or referenced	2 (40%)	2 (33%)	6 (67%)	3 (75%)	4 (80%)
Human rights framework (Charter / provincial HR Code) explicitly cited	3 (60%)	2 (33%)	9 (100%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)
Student-led GSA / diversity clubs supported	3 (60%)	1 (17%)*	7 (78%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)

Note. \*Post-2023 legislation bans (SK) or prohibitively restricts (AB) third-party sexual health partnerships. N/A indicates opt-out/opt-in question not applicable at school board level. Percentages reflect Yes coding of verified documents in each jurisdiction.

**Table 4b.** EDI and Sexual Health Provisions — RPS and WSD School Boards.

EDI/Sexual Health Sub-Category	RPS n=3	WSD n=4
Explicit 2SLGBTQ+ affirmation / recognition in student supports	3 (100%)	4 (100%)
Sexual health education policy present	2 (67%)	3 (75%)
Community / third-party partnerships for sexual health maintained	2 (67%)	3 (75%)
Affirming gender identity supports codified	3 (100%)	4 (100%)
Cultural competency / EDI staff training mandated or referenced	2 (67%)	4 (100%)
Human rights framework explicitly cited	3 (100%)	4 (100%)
Student-led GSA / diversity clubs supported	3 (100%)	4 (100%)

Note. RPS = Regina Public Schools (n=3); WSD = Winnipeg School Division (n=4). All percentages reflect Yes coding of verified documents.

## 6. Health and EDI Impacts: Evidence Review

### 6.1. Mental Health and Suicide Risk Among 2SLGBTQ+ Youth

The mental health consequences of non-affirming school and family environments for 2SLGBTQ+ youth are extensively documented. Statistics Canada data indicate that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in Canada are five times more likely to consider suicide and seven times more likely to attempt it compared to their heterosexual peers [19]. Transgender and gender-diverse youth face compounding risks [19,20]. A 2025 Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality study examining gender minority youth aged 15-17 in the context of anti-trans legislation including Saskatchewan's Bill 137 found that policies requiring parental consent before a student's self-determined gender-affirming identity can be recognised at school expose transgender and gender-expansive youth to significant risks of familial rejection and preventable stress [20]. Hatzenbuehler's structural stigma framework [23,24] predicts that policy environments signalling governmental non-acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ identities will produce measurable, population-level mental health harms, a prediction with direct application to both Bill 137 and Bill 27.

The Winnipeg School Division's own website (Doc.34,36) explicitly acknowledges this evidence: 'Inclusive policies and nurturing practices help to build a learning environment in which our most vulnerable students feel safe and valued, reducing the risk of self-harm and suicide. Studies show that creating a supportive environment for 2SLGBTQ+ students improves educational outcomes for all students.' This evidence-based framing stands in direct contrast to the policy direction of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

### 6.2. Sexual Health Literacy and Public Health Risks

Saskatchewan already faced comparatively elevated rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), teen pregnancy, and sexual violence prior to its 2023 restrictions. The elimination of third-party sexual health educators who provided evidence-based programming on consent, STI prevention, and healthy relationships represents a significant reduction in public health infrastructure. Research has consistently shown that comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education is associated with delayed sexual initiation, higher rates of contraceptive use, reduced incidence of sexual violence, and increased help-seeking behaviour [21]. Alberta's opt-in model for

all 'human sexuality' content including consent education beginning in Grade 1 means students are excluded from consent education by default. Given that approximately 35% of Albertans report having experienced sexual abuse before age 18, this exclusion constitutes a measurable public health risk.

### 6.3. *Disproportionate Impacts on Specific Populations*

The impacts of these policy changes are not uniformly distributed. 2SLGBTQ+ students in families with non-affirming attitudes face the highest risk from pronoun and name consent requirements [19,20]. Indigenous students including those whose cultural traditions include Two-Spirit and other gender-diverse identities long recognised by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are placed in a particularly anomalous position by policies rooted in a Western, nuclear-family parental rights framework. Manitoba's provincial framework explicitly acknowledges Two-Spirit identities [12,13,15,18], while neither Alberta's Bill 27 nor Saskatchewan's Bill 137 contain any Indigenous cultural competency provisions related to gender and sexual diversity.

## 7. School Board Responses and Autonomy

A consistent theme across both Saskatchewan and Alberta is the tension between provincial legislative direction and school board autonomy a tension that itself carries EDI implications, as school boards have historically been important sites for locally responsive, community-grounded EDI implementation. In Alberta, EPSB's Board of Trustees formally expressed opposition to Bill 27's direction (documented in board minutes), stated that its SOGIE policy [25,26] remained in force until further notice, and reaffirmed its commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ students through its Anti-Racism, Reconciliation and Equity Action Plan [27]. CBE (Doc.21-24) maintained its SOGI guidelines while implementing required opt-in processes. Regina Public Schools, despite Saskatchewan's Bill 137, maintained its AP 353 Students and Gender and Sexual Diversity [30] and AP 110 EDI [31] procedures, along with GSA supports [32].

By contrast, Manitoba's legislative framework preserves meaningful school board autonomy [15]. While the Public Schools Act establishes minimum standards including mandatory development of Respect for Human Diversity policies school divisions retain authority to develop their own implementation approaches, reflect the diversity of their specific communities, and build locally tailored partnerships with health organisations. Winnipeg School Division's Equity Progress Report (June 2025) [35] documents active implementation: ongoing 'Inclusion Across the Rainbow' programming, community-led EDI professional development, and the formation of a committee focused on Black Excellence demonstrating how affirmative provincial legislation enables proactive school board innovation rather than defensive compliance management.

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1. *'Parental Rights' as a Policy Frame: Critical Assessment*

The legislative changes in Saskatchewan and Alberta have been consistently framed by their advocates as ensuring parental transparency and involvement. However, critical policy analysis of the verified documents in this review reveals significant tensions between the stated rationale and the implemented mechanism. First, the transparency argument conflates content disclosure — broadly supportable with identity surveillance, which is qualitatively different [1,6]. Second, the argument assumes parental-student interest congruence an assumption the evidence decisively contests in cases of non-affirming families [19,20]. Third, the opt-in model presupposes that sexual health education requires affirmative justification whereas its absence does not embed a normative judgement inconsistent with the evidence base and with public health expertise [21]. Fourth, the internal inconsistency within Alberta's policy suite is notable: Bill 27 (Doc.1) conditionalizes the very

2SLGBTQ+ protections that the Safe and Caring Schools (Doc.3), GSA (Doc.4), and Inclusive Education (Doc.2) frameworks ostensibly guarantee.

### 8.2. *The Rule of Law and the Notwithstanding Clause*

The pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause in Saskatchewan (Doc.6) deserves critical attention. Section 33 of the Canadian Charter was designed as a deliberative tool for genuine cases of competing rights, after judicial processes had run their course. Its use to shield a government policy from review before a court had even assessed its constitutionality represents a significant departure from the intended function of the clause and was criticized by legal experts, the Canadian Bar Association's Sexual and Gender Diversity Alliance, and former architects of the clause itself. The resignation of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner, Heather Kuttai, in direct response to the introduction of Bill 137, represents a form of institutional protest by the province's own independent human rights body, a development with no parallel in Manitoba's policy trajectory.

### 8.3. *Manitoba as a Policy Comparator*

Manitoba's experience, documented across nine verified provincial documents (Doc.12-20), confirms that inclusive, EDI-consistent policies are not merely aspirational but are practically implementable within a Prairie Province context. The province's sustained investment in collaborative policy development including co-production with EGALÉ Canada, active community partnership maintenance, and ongoing 2SLGBTQIA+ service engagement demonstrates that the political and governance conditions for EDI-consistent approaches are achievable. The 2024 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Engagement (Doc.16) and the updated Guidelines for Supporting and Affirming Trans and Gender Diverse Students (Doc.18) indicate continued policy development, in contrast to the legislative rollbacks in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

### 8.4. *Implications for Policy and Research*

These findings call on policymakers in Alberta and Saskatchewan to acknowledge the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ students and the public health evidence supporting comprehensive sexual health education. The analysis confirms that policy emphasis on opt-in models and ministerial vetting creates significant equity gaps where student-specific services are eliminated or externalized rather than embedded in the school system. Addressing this gap requires adopting targeted universalism policy frameworks approaches that support students based on their unique challenges and strengths within specific structures, cultures, and geographies, moving toward the universal goal of equitable well-being for all students.

Future research should employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs to understand the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ students following these legislative changes, to evaluate the real-world impact on mental health outcomes, and to examine the efficacy of school board resistance and accommodation strategies. Intra-categorical intersectional analyses accounting for gender, race, disability, and immigration background will be essential to refine policy and ensure reforms translate into tangible improvements for Canada's growing 2SLGBTQ+ youth population.

## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1. *For Provincial Governments (Saskatchewan and Alberta)*

- Repeal or substantially revise Bill 137 (SK) and the Education Amendment Act 2024 (AB) to eliminate compulsory parental disclosure ('outing') requirements. Any parental engagement framework must include a robust, consistently applied safety exception [1,6].
- Reverse the shift from opt-out to opt-in models for sexual health education, restoring the pedagogical and public health consensus that comprehensive sexual health education — including consent education — is a default entitlement, not an optional supplement [7,13].

- Restore and expand partnerships with community-based sexual health and 2SLGBTQ+ organisations. Update policy documents to eliminate the categorical ban (SK) and prohibitive ministerial approval barrier (AB) on third-party sexual health education [6,7].
- Commit to co-developed, consultative policy processes that include school boards, teachers' associations, child and youth advocates, health authorities, and community organisations before implementing major changes to sexual health and gender-identity policies in schools.

### 9.2. For School Boards (All Three Provinces)

- Advocate explicitly and publicly for legislative frameworks protecting school board autonomy in EDI policy and maintaining minimum conditions for 2SLGBTQ+-affirming school environments [25–29,33–36].
- Within current legislative constraints, maximise use of available discretion including safety counselling provisions [1], incidental reference carve-outs, and administrative policy development to maintain the most affirming environments possible.
- Develop comprehensive, accessible support systems for 2SLGBTQ+ students connecting them with community resources, counselling, and peer networks, particularly where legislative restrictions have reduced in-school options [32,34].

### 9.3. For the Federal Government

- Strengthen federal guidance on the use of the notwithstanding clause, establishing clear norms against its pre-emptive, non-emergency invocation to shield legislation from judicial review where the legislation targets the rights of vulnerable groups [cf. Doc.6].
- Maintain and permanently fund the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund (SRHF), ensuring provinces like Saskatchewan have access to federal support for restoring community-based sexual health education partnerships.

## 10. Conclusion

This comparative analysis of 36 verified policy documents retrieved through a systematic search of official government and school board websites has demonstrated a stark structural divergence among Canada's three Prairie Provinces on the question of whether equity, diversity, and inclusion principles will be enacted or dismantled in school-based sexual health and gender-identity policy. Saskatchewan's Bill 137 (Doc.6) and Alberta's Education Amendment Act 2024 (Doc.1) represent the most consequential legislative restrictions on 2SLGBTQ+-affirming education in Canadian history, combining compulsory parental disclosure mechanisms, opt-in models for sexual health education, ministerial content vetting, and in Saskatchewan's case the pre-emptive invocation of the notwithstanding clause.

The evidence, consistent across this policy review and the broader literature [19–24], is unambiguous: these policies impose measurable harms on the most vulnerable students in the provincial education systems. 2SLGBTQ+ youth are deprived of school environments that affirm their identities and provide accurate, comprehensive health information. Broader student populations are denied default access to consent education and sexual health literacy. Community health partnerships developed over more than a decade are severed or made prohibitively difficult.

Manitoba's continued commitment to a rights-affirming, EDI-consistent framework documented across nine verified provincial documents (Doc.12-20) demonstrates that an alternative path is available: one that preserves parental engagement while maintaining the foundational principle that every student, regardless of family circumstance, deserves a school environment in which they are seen, valued, and safe. The stakes in this policy debate are measured in the mental health, physical safety, and educational success of hundreds of thousands of young people across the Canadian Prairies. The convergence of EDI scholarship, public health evidence, and human rights

analysis points in a single direction: toward the urgent restoration and strengthening of inclusive, evidence-based sexual health education and gender-affirming school environments for all students.

## Strengths and Limitations

A principal strength of this study is the transparency and verifiability of the document corpus: all 36 included documents were retrieved directly from official government and school board websites and are listed in Table 2 with URLs. This supports reproducibility. The two-tiered cross-comparison between provincial and school board levels, guided by the IBPA framework, allows examination of the gap between legislative direction and board-level implementation. The use of structured sub-coding across consistent categories enables meaningful cross-jurisdictional comparison.

Limitations include the restriction to publicly accessible documents, which may exclude internal or unpublished guidelines informing on-the-ground implementation. The search was conducted in May 2026 and represents a snapshot; policy changes occurring after this date are not captured. The study is limited to public school boards; separate (Catholic), charter, and federally-funded First Nations schools were not examined. The focus on the Prairies is deliberate but limits generalisability to other Canadian jurisdictions. Future research should conduct primary qualitative investigation with students, educators, and community health workers to assess real-world impacts of these policy frameworks.

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