

**MAPC POSITION STATEMENT**  
**March 2019**  
**MAPC Statement of Belief**  
**Student Safety in Manitoba Schools**

- *Respectfully submitted by Manitoba Association of Parent Councils Board of Directors for consideration at its 2019 Annual General Meeting*

## **Background**

In 2004, Manitoba made it law that every school in the province has a responsibility to provide all students with a safe and caring school community through the creation of codes of conduct and emergency plans.

<https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/2004/c02404e.php> This philosophy was further expanded upon in 2013 with the introduction of the Safe and Inclusive Schools Act, which stated that every school division must have a respect for human diversity policy and ensure that such policies be implemented throughout the entire division. [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/human\\_diversity/document.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/human_diversity/document.pdf)

In response to this act, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils created a *Response to Bill 18 (later named Safe and Inclusive Schools)* <https://mapc.mb.ca/files/Safe-and-Inclusive-Schools.pdf> . This document demonstrated the support of parents throughout the province for all students to feel safe, respected, and included within their school communities, regardless of race, colour, family or socio-economic status, language spoken, culture, religion, gender, mobility, physical or mental characteristics, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

## **Introduction**

Students of all ages living throughout the province often seek assistance from teachers and guidance counsellors for a variety of reasons on a daily basis. While many of these conversations may be simple to address, others are highly complex and carry a potential to create harm for the student – specifically when it comes to consent and disclosure for students regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

While school and divisional policies provide school communities with the foundations needed to provide students with safe environments, there are additional considerations which are not often clearly stated surrounding consent to disclosure by a school to a student's family regarding a child's participation in groups, such as Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, or declarations of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Guidance counsellors are often faced with the dilemma of making decisions which attempt to balance a student's right to privacy against a potential need for help when a safety issue presents itself. This dilemma becomes even more complicated if the educator believes – in their best professional judgement - that there may be an additional risk to the student's safety if the family were to become involved. This concern can be alleviated when the child has reached the legal age of maturity or has been determined to be at a level of maturity where they can demonstrate that they are competent and well-informed in dealing with their personal matters – even if they have not yet reached the legal age of maturity in Manitoba.

## **ACTION REQUEST**

In recognition of these dilemmas, and on behalf of its membership and parents throughout Manitoba, the MAPC Board of Directors would like to share the following proposed statements of belief with its education partners and the media.

1. MAPC believes that students have the right to disclose information pertaining to their participation in groups and/or matters relating to their sexual orientation and gender identity when they are ready. It is a matter of individual privacy when, and if, they choose to share this information with their family.
2. MAPC believes educators throughout the province have a need to use their best professional judgement when it pertains specifically to a student's physical, mental, and psychological safety and well-being. When they are called upon to share information they must carefully consider whether the sharing would contribute – or deter – from the best interests of the child.
3. MAPC believes that if the safety of any student is threatened by disclosing such information, the best interests of the child shall prevail and no information shall be shared.
4. MAPC encourages all educators to be well versed in privacy legislation, human rights education, and child safety and protection laws, so the best decisions possible can be made when circumstances demand it.
5. While MAPC is founded on the principles of parental engagement in school communities, specifically in the areas of inclusion and safety of students, it also recognizes and respects the autonomy of education professionals in what are often difficult circumstances.