

## EDUCATION

# Prince George trustees reject anti-homophobia policy

## 'We need to do better than that': teacher

**Nathaniel Christopher**

**PRINCE GEORGE SCHOOL TRUSTEES** have decided against adopting a stand-alone anti-homophobia policy similar to those adopted in 15 other British Columbia school districts.

Instead, the Prince George school board plans to improve existing policies that deal with gay issues, according to chair Sharel Warrington.

The board reviewed its policies around harassment, sexual orientation and bullying, and is committed to dealing with harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, Warrington says. "We need to deal with it in school through education."

Prince George District Teachers' Association first vice-president Tina Cousins is disappointed with the board's decision.

"Our feeling is there's an elephant in the room and it's pink," she says. "The stories should tell you that there's more to this. There's not enough support for these kids. They went back to a document that was written in 2003 and finally sent out to schools in 2006.

It was called 'Safer Schools.'"

The Safer Schools research project examined harassment and discrimination against gay youth in Prince George schools after an 18-year-old student killed himself in May 2002. Jamie Lazarre's suicide note said he couldn't take the harassment anymore.

The report recommended that the school district educate the school and the community to increase awareness of the effects of language and increase the understanding of harassment policies.

Cousins believes the current policies are inadequate to address the issues of homophobia and gay-positive education in schools.

"We do not want you to just add to an existing policy for many reasons," she told the board. "Existing policies are not sufficient. If they were, do you think we would have heard Travis Shaw's story about bullets being taped to his locker? Would we have heard students telling us that they are repeatedly called names? Hearing that the GSA club is the only place that

the students feel safe is shameful. We need to do better than that for these students and staff members."

Susan Trabant runs the gay-straight alliance at Prince George Secondary School, where she teaches. She says

**IF YOU ASK LGBT STUDENTS IF THEY FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL, EVERY ONE OF THEM WILL SAY NO.**

—Susan Trabant, teacher

a stand-alone policy would serve an educational purpose of teaching administrators, students and teachers what is and isn't acceptable and articulating the consequences for

any infractions.

"If you ask LGBT students if they feel safe at school, every one of them will say no," Trabant says. "They are not just beat up, but they constantly hear things like 'You're such a fag, homo' or 'That's so gay.' Who wants to be in an environment that's poisoned by sayings like that all day long?"

Warrington agrees and says the board has recommended that a greater emphasis be put on the education component.

"At this point we're developing a more progressive education piece," she says. "Right now it's being fleshed out, discussed through our administrators in our school. It's an action that we are encouraging to continue."

Among the educational components anticipated, she cites activities in schools to teach the importance of treating others respectfully.

Trabant says teachers and students will continue to advocate for a stand-alone policy.

"It doesn't mean we're going to stop here," she says. "We're going to continue to pursue it. We're not sure what the next step is going to be, but I'm sure students and parents do not want to let it end here."

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