

Respect for Human Diversity - Frequently Asked Questions

Question: *If students in a school request to establish a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) by that name or an equivalent, can the school refuse claiming the needs of the students are already accommodated under existing organizations such as anti-bullying or other social justice groups?*

Answer: No, legislation clearly states that requests from students to establish and lead GSAs or other organizations promoting anti-racism, awareness of/respect for people with disabilities, and people of all gender attractions or identities must be accommodated. While broad social justice groups can play an important role in creating safe and inclusive schools, it is important to recognize that marginalized equity-owed communities may benefit from a group that addresses their specific needs and contexts. Having a broad social justice group should not preclude student-led Indigenous culture clubs, anti-racism groups, or GSAs operating in a school. These student-led groups should be seen as complementing each other, rather than in competition with each other.

Question: *Can a school refuse to establish a student-requested GSA because of the dominant religious beliefs or cultural values expressed by some members of the school community?*

Answer: All Manitoba public and funded independent schools are required to comply with [The Public Schools Act](#). The religious or cultural beliefs of members of a particular religious group or community do not supersede the right of students to establish a GSA, which is intended to make schools safer and more inclusive for 2SLGBTQIA+ and ally pupils and families. Manitobans are free to belong to a particular religion or creed, hold religious beliefs, and participate in religious associations and religious activities. They have the right to enroll their children in independent schools to access a learning milieu that reflects the tenets of their faith. However, regardless of a religious perspective or belief with respect to diversity of gender attraction, identity and expression, a school may not act in ways that discriminate in a manner prohibited by [The Human Rights Code of Manitoba](#) (the Code) against others based on these or any other form or combination of protected characteristics.

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Question: How would a group of students that wants to form a religiously based student-led group need to be accommodated?

Answer: The Code includes religion or creed, religious belief, religious association, and religious activity as one of the protected characteristics. Amendments to [The Public Schools Act](#) include specific reference to [The Manitoba Human Rights Code](#), so students wanting to form a religiously based student-led group would be accorded equality of opportunity to do so. Students should be allowed to form after-school clubs or have activities based on religion, as long as membership is voluntarily open to any student in the school and the activities of the group are conducted in a safe and inclusive manner. The club should be used as a vehicle to discuss issues that have an impact on the members as students. It is important to recognize that such groups are like any other club that is available at a school except they have a religious connection. Therefore, they should be treated the same as any other student-initiated club in the school such as a GSA, chess club, astronomy club, or judo club.

Question: How can one request to establish a Student Club or Activity?

Answer: Students who wish to establish a student club or organize a specific activity must submit a proposal to school administration for review and consideration. This proposal should include:

- the nature and purpose of the club or activity
- an assessment of the school climate
- possible obstacles
- rationale for the club or activity
- frequency of meetings
- how the meetings will be advertised
- a mission statement
- proposed group rules and/or guidelines.

The club or activity must be consistent with and comply with school board and school policies. All such clubs and activities should be open to all students who wish to participate in an appropriate manner.

The proposal will then be reviewed by school administration, in consultation with other appropriate school staff members, such as school counsellors, social workers, or other resource personnel, to ascertain: the purpose and goals of the activity or club, the requirements for school space or supervision and other resources, and that the proposal is consistent with school and division goals and principles.

Sources: [Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools](#) and [Safe and Caring Schools - A Resource for Equity and Inclusion in Manitoba Schools MB MYGSA](#)

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