Back-to-school Culture of Fear

Research Report on the Implementation of Alberta's Bill 27, Bill 29 and Ministerial Order 030/2025

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Introduction

The start of a new school year is typically a time full of anticipation and great preparation while teachers refine long range plans, purchase resources, and prepare their classrooms for new groups of students. Usually, educators have two to three operational days when they participate in staff meetings meant to inspire an engaging and successful school year, where administrators aim to share focused educational goals and invigorate their staff for the year ahead. In late August of 2025, however, the return to school was instead met with the solemn weight of the implementation of new legislation that directly impacted the autonomy of queer and trans youth. Instead of focusing on new ideas that would improve student learning and prioritizing student-centred objectives, teachers were met with the request to silence anti-bullying discussions, police young girls' bodies, remove resources from their rooms, and participate in harming students.

This research report is the result of an intensive study conducted in September of 2025, where 30 educators from across Alberta participated in semi-structured interviews to share what they had been asked to do in order to implement Bills 27, 29, and Ministerial Order 030/2025. All of the educators interviewed spoke to the specific ways in which they were instructed by administrators to catalogue and remove resources, to change affirming practices, to censor topics and present obstacles to girls' sports. Teachers spoke to the multiple ways in which they felt that educators were being attacked as a strike countdown loomed. They were frustrated that their school boards were enforcing the implementation of policy that was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Bill of Rights, Section 33 of the Education Act, and their own professional understanding of best practices. Although all school boards represented were found to have interpreted and implemented the policy in ways that are discriminatory, there was some nuance with which tasks fell on educators versus their administrators or school counsellors, and when student consent was considered. The research team therefore recommends that if school boards will be mandating these discriminatory policies, that they intensely engage in several harm reduction strategies to limit their damage.

Context

In January of 2024, Danielle Smith produced a video stating that “[she] wants every Albertan that identifies as transgender to know that [she] care[s] deeply about [them] and accepts [them] for who [they] are.” This statement was followed by a direct attack on the autonomy and rights of said youth, later correlating with a rise in hate speech and crimes in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2025). Despite a massive public outcry including letter writing campaigns, protests, and national public petitions, the United Conservative Party introduced three Bills into the legislature in October of 2024 that would restrict or remove the rights of trans people in this province: Bills 26, 27, and 29. These Bills were passed and received Royal Assent shortly thereafter. Later, in May of 2025, the Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaides, held a press conference to announce that library restrictions would be coming to schools in Alberta. Ministerial Order 030/2025 was signed on July 4, 2025 and implementation was mandated by October 1, 2025.

Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, was not a focus of this study as educators themselves were not involved in its implementation. However, Bill 26 shows strong correlation with circulating anti-trans discourse in Alberta, including its schools. For example, in a statement released by the Premier, “It is so important that all youth can enter adulthood equipped to make adult decisions” (Government of Alberta, 2024a). This statement removes autonomy from children concerning the ability to make decisions about their own bodies and well-being. It implies that all forms of gender-affirming health care are permanent, irreversible, and regrettable decisions. This is not the medical consensus, as the American Medical Association (2021) has demonstrated that puberty blockers have no negative impact on future fertility, and in fact, improve health outcomes for trans youth. The government press release calls on notions of “science” and “compassion”, which flies in the face of the “empirical evidence [that demonstrates] that trans and non-binary gender identities are normal variations of human identity and expression” (American Medical Association, 2021). The language of the media surrounding Bill 26, through the labelling of “life-altering decisions” and “sex-reassignment surgeries,” mobilizes the fear of trans bodies held by some cis people.

The government statement also frames trans youth as going through “a time that can be difficult and confusing”, implying that being a young trans person is a hardship in and of itself. The framing by the Alberta Government is carefully designed to incite fear and repression of gender affirmation outside of a sex-assigned binary. This language serves to reproduce a moral panic around young trans people, which translates into implications within the education system, including restrictions on discussions, autonomy in self-naming, the silencing of anti-bullying programs and anti-sexual violence programs, and the removal of freedom of expression in schools.

Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, included multiple elements that led to the limiting of educators’ abilities to create safe and caring spaces in schools. Framed by the Alberta Government in the language of “supporting Alberta students”, this Bill would require teachers to out students, even in potentially abusive situations, if they sought to use a new name or pronoun to affirm their gender identity (Government of Alberta, 2024b). Research has demonstrated that many queer and trans youth will come out at school and to peers first, as being out to their families can potentially have devastating impacts in some scenarios (Russell et al., 2016). These self-chosen names and pronouns could not be used for students under the age of 16 if parental consent had not been obtained. Bill 27 also changed sexual health education to an opt-in, rather than opt-out subject matter in schools. Limiting access to sexual violence prevention and sexual health education is directly correlated with negative outcomes for youth (Kim et al., 2023). This amendment included the prohibition on the discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation without an opt-in form. Studies have shown that sexual orientation and gender identity are primary elements of bullying (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024; Lambe et al., 2025), and these topics had recently been the focus of many Alberta school boards due to their mandates to create safe and caring schools (Alberta Government, 2025, Section 33) and educators’ professional obligations to establish inclusive learning environments (Teaching Quality Standard, 2023). Through an obscure process controlled internally through Alberta Education without clear guidelines or directives, resources and third party presenters now also needed to be vetted through the ministry to determine their acceptability for use in schools. To date, no resources about sexual orientation or gender identity have been approved (Alberta Government, 2023).

In a governmental overreach hitherto unseen in Canada, the Alberta government mandated amateur sports organizations to monitor and police all who participate in their leagues. Bill 29, the Ensuring Fairness and Safety in Sport Act (Government of Alberta, 2024c) requires all girls and women who register in a “female-only” league, including schools, private institutions, and provincial leagues, to establish processes for determining “female sex at birth.” The government then produced a model policy, which included procedures for how opponents and spectators could “challenge” the sex of any participating athlete. The person challenging the athlete would remain confidential, but the targeted athlete would need to produce documentation from the assessment of their sex at the time of their birth (to be specific, that a doctor was witness to the athlete being in possession of a vulva at birth). This policy impacted educators in schools as they were required to distribute these forms to girls as young as twelve and collect their sensitive health information. Schools would also need to determine processes for sex challenges, notifying teen girl athletes if their sex was being challenged, and processes for confirming that their documentation was sufficient.

While the legislation mobilizes the language of “fairness and safety”, the research team questions why the greatest evidence-based barrier to women and girls participation in sports is being ignored: their underfunding (Van Tuyckyom et al.; Berri, 2017). The ramifications for student athletes from low socio-economic families - perhaps already struggling with financial impacts of school sport participation such as uniforms, gear, league fees, tournament transportation and participation - required to access medical information from their births, or for student athletes new to their school districts, from other Canadian or international jurisdictions not aligned to Alberta standards have yet to be seen, but can be predicted to be onerous in the extreme. Similarly, racialized students of colour are the most common targets of gender challenges (Barnes, 2023; Semenya, 2023), and being subjected to such removes their right to a safe and caring school environment. Based on research consensus, if the government was concerned with fairness and safety, their actions would prioritize increasing funding and advancing inclusion.

Ministerial Order 030/2025, Standards for the Selection, Availability, and Access of School Library Materials, colloquially referred to by the public as the book ban, was to be implemented by October 1, 2025 (Government of Alberta, 2025a). After announcing incoming changes to schools, a massive public survey demonstrated that the majority of Albertans were not interested in the censorship of books in schools (Government of Alberta, 2025b). Educators were tasked with cataloging all of the resources in their classroom libraries as well as their school libraries, and removing any sexual content below grade 10 other than religious texts, and any explicit sexual content for grade ten and older, other than religious texts. On August 28, 2025, a list from the Edmonton School Division of books that would be removed from library shelves and classrooms due to Ministerial Order 030/2025 was leaked to the public. This list sparked outrage from teachers, parents, and notably, Margaret Atwood, whose book, The Handmaid's Tale, appeared on the list. After public outcry, the Premier stated that Edmonton Public had "viciously complied" with the instructions of the order and that the government would make the instructions more clear. The ministry amended the Order to include only visuals of sexual content, including graphic novels and film, and extended the timeline for its implementation to January of 2026.

Importantly, the return to schools in 2025 was atypical despite these changes in legislation. After an impasse in negotiations between the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) and the Alberta Teachers' Association, ATA members voted 94.5% in favour of strike authorization (Clement, 2025a). On their website, the ATA set a strike countdown clock, which changed daily. Four months' notice was given for TEBA to provide a proposal that reflected the concerns of Alberta teachers: addressing classroom size and complexity contractually with concrete indicators, and a wage increase that recovered some of the lost purchasing power over the last decade. When teachers returned to their classrooms in September of 2025, a strike loomed. The implementation of these Bills and the Ministerial Order presented an additional workload for educators who had already expressed their "deep frustration with critical classroom issues" (Clement, 2025b).

Furthermore, changes to the Teacher Profession Discipline process and the Code of Professional Conduct in 2023 continued to evoke fear and self-censorship from educators. The Code outlined that teachers could not teach or lead with "ideological […] advantage" over their students.

As no definition was provided for what this meant, this notion was left up to individual interpretation. Now, any member of the public could claim that an educator had exercised ideological advantage over their students. While waiting for a conclusion to the complaint and investigation, the named teacher would have a note placed on their file that a potential employer should contact the registrar for more information. The Alberta Teaching Profession Commission's process appears to be slower than the previous process managed by the ATA, as fewer cases have been concluded despite an increase in complaints (French, 2023). This new system has left many teachers feeling anxious when teaching about anti-oppression, anti-bullying, consent-based education, or any other topic that may be interpreted as ideological to an outsider. Teachers are self-censoring their inclusion work due to a Foucauldian (1975) panopticon effect of this new discipline process. Many teachers are currently awaiting information after complaints related to pride flags or anti-racism discussions.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression have been read into human rights protections through legal precedent (Vriend v. Alberta, 1998) and legislative amendment (C-16, 2016; Alberta Human Rights Act, 2023). Legislation is subject to a challenge when it is explicitly discriminatory or universally interpreted in a discriminatory way. Many educators expressed that they had hoped that their school boards would not implement these policies as they seemed to be explicitly in violation of other components of the Education Act, the Charter, and the Alberta Human Rights Act. They felt that the Charter represented the supreme law of Alberta, Canada, and therefore they would not be asked to violate it in day-to-day practice. After the announcement of the Bills, teachers felt it would be impossible to ethically implement them in their school, due to their other legal obligations under the Education Act. They also felt that all three Bills would soon be blocked through court injunctions and deemed in contradiction of protected rights, as the Charter protects all individuals in Canada, regardless of age. However, on November 18, 2025, the Alberta Government invoked Section 33, the Notwithstanding Clause, for the second, third and fourth time in the span of a month in order to shield these bills from legal challenges under sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the Charter (freedom of expression, legal rights, and equality rights). Despite previously saying that the government was in the right and they would fight the bills out in court (Smith, December 4, 2024), the use of the Notwithstanding Clause implies admission that these Bills do in fact violate the rights and freedoms of educators and students in schools.

Methodology

This study was launched in late August of 2025 as Alberta teachers headed back to school with directives surrounding Bills 27, 29, and Ministerial Order 030/2025. After ethics approval, a research poster was circulated on social media. Within 48 hours, the study team was overwhelmed with potential participants. We spoke to any current teacher in Alberta who responded who was able to meet us during the month of September within our schedules. The majority of the interviews took place online, while less than one third took place in person at local coffee shops in the Edmonton area. We spoke to teachers from Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern regions of Alberta, as well as from the greater metro Edmonton and Calgary areas. Participants signed a University Research Ethics Board (Pro00121922) approved consent form and were compensated with a gift card of their choice. They were sent their transcript as a member check (Birt et al., 2023) with their name and school removed, and we were able to further anonymize data if specific details might have placed their confidentiality at risk. This was especially important with the surge in doxxing beginning to take place from both far right social media platforms as well as from school boards, including teachers within Edmonton Public Schools, who had been internally disciplined for expressing on social media that they would not deadname students.

The research team sought to understand what the day-to-day implementation of Bill 27 and Ministerial Order 030/2025 looked like for Alberta's teachers and how it impacted their perception of their work in education. Thirty teachers from across all of Alberta's regions participated in one-hour, semi-structured interviews in the month of September. This sample size is considered significant in qualitative research methodology (Squire et al., 2024). Teachers explained the myriad of ways in which the legislation had been interpreted and implemented within their local contexts. Mostly, our questions focused around what specifically teachers had been asked to do in order to comply with the legislation. Teachers were also asked questions surrounding their perceptions of what it meant to be an educator under policy that shifted away from student-centered learning and towards other political priorities, as well as about their colleagues' resistance or compliance to incoming policies.

The research team did not ask specific questions surrounding Bill 29, but the participants were eager to speak to its impact on underage girls' sports teams within their sites. Our research method of semi-structured interviews allowed us to examine the implementation of this legislation as well (Whiting, 2008).

The transcripts were then analyzed by multiple researchers using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Foucault, 1969; 1978). We read for patterns surrounding the interpretation of the legislation at each site. We also read for the variations in the ways that school boards were erasing or maintaining some level of student autonomy and professional judgement. As we coded our data, we sorted the identified codes into themes surrounding generalizations, nuance, and impacts on staff and students (Gibbs, 2018). We discuss these themes using a sampling of the empirical evidence collected (Kvale, 1996). From these themes, we have elaborated a suggested list of harm reduction strategies for school boards to consider to best support the people learning and working in their schools.

Findings

Generalizations of implementation

Pronouns and names. Educators expressed both a moral and legal dilemma through the implementation of name and pronoun restrictions within Bill 27. All of the participants were told that they needed to out students who requested the use of a new name or pronoun in relation to their gender identity to their guardians. For students under 16, they would not be able to use the requested name and/or pronouns without documented guardian consent. For example, one teacher stated: “In the process of figuring out what names we’re allowed to use, I've been told to use dead names for the time being, and and pronouns, and, you know, having to tell kids, like, sorry, I don't know what I'm allowed to call you.” P8 Many of the staff interviewed had previously received some form of professional development from their school board that had imparted the importance of affirming a student through their chosen name or pronoun as a form of best practice. Being asked to use a different name went against the standard of inclusion (Paechter et al., 2021). Teachers also worried about their legal obligations towards human rights under both federal and provincial law. One teacher said, “you know, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms [includes] trans, like, gender identity as a protected area. Why should that change for an under, like, an under the age of minority student” (P9)? Teachers felt that they were at risk of discipline no matter what they decided to do, saying, for example: “You can't even ask them, like, how to address them and what makes them most comfortable, and so some of my colleagues were like, […] how do we do it without, like, getting in trouble?” (P14).

There was some confusion about the extent to which teachers were to ensure that the name and pronoun change had to do with gender identity.

For example, one teacher said: “What our school division has decided is, if it has to do with gender identity, it's not allowed. But if you're like Nicholas and you want to go by Nick, perfectly fine” (P28). Meanwhile, another participant from another school board stated “It says that you could have a nickname as long as it doesn't change your gender. But if you're named Samantha, and you go by Sam, is that changing like your gender identity? So [I asked] for a list clarifying the gender of every single name” (P20). Educators felt uncertain about how they were being asked to monitor which names carried which gender and whether they should be prodding a student for more information about their gender identity.

Teachers also spoke to examples where they had to relay the new legislation to students. One teacher shared:

A student in one of my classes tried to tell me they wanted to go by she instead of he today, and I didn't know what to say, so I stopped this person, and I told them, ‘there is [a] new rule, or there are new rules from the government right now, where I'm going to have to talk to your parents if you divulge any information to me right now. I would love to respect who you are, but if you say anything further to me, I'm going to have to initiate a protocol with the principal involved that eventually will lead up to involving your parents.’ And I could just see these tears filling the students' eyes. (P10)

Another teacher shared an example of a student in a precarious abusive situation, who did ask to use a different name and pronouns than they had previously:

One of my students this semester who did come up and say, I go by a different name, I go by different pronouns. And this student has, like, an abusive father, and is going, like, in and out of homeless shelters, and is currently living with friends, not even parents, but they're only 15. So… I'm supposed to, what, call this abusive parent and be like, hi, are you okay [with this]? (P19)

Overall, the interviewed participants felt discomfort, anxiety, and helplessness at being asked to limit student rights and expression, being the arbitrator of whether or not a decision was related to gender identity, and outing students in abusive or unsupportive situations.

Sports. As mentioned previously, our study did not set out to study Bill 29, but educators were frustrated about their involvement in its implementation. Generally, educators felt disgusted about being involved in asking girls for their sensitive personal health information and policing their bodies. They felt shock at being asked to do so, saying, for example: “The form that females have to sign to play sports. Oh. My. God. It is nobody else's business what type of genitals a person has in their pants” (P9).

They unanimously shared that this was only impacting girls’ sports teams:

And then on the first day of school, we had this, like, giant meeting with all, like, female athletes, or all students who were looking to join, like, a female team [...]. All these girls are in this gym, and like, we had stacks of those forms that we were like, we have to sign, and then we're standing there, too, and we're like, how do we track this? (P14)

Another educator said, “we are only sending letters to the girls on a sports team, so if they've made the cut, then they get a letter; if they're on the team. We're not blanketing the whole school population.” (P6) One teacher shared that parents were also shocked to learn that even co-ed sports would require policing: We have informed our parent council about this, and they were quite shocked because it was mixed groupings. It's like co-ed groupings, so they were shocked that female athletes would still have to sign that form” (P27).

Teachers expressed how harmful they felt this would be to their student athletes, and women’s sports in general: “it’s not only hurting or discouraging trans folks, it's also hurting just girls and teens, like young women, from participating in sport, period. [A]nd, like, so blatantly done without any, like, trying to hide it. [...] It wasn't done on the male side of sport either” (P10). They questioned the attack on girls’ involvement and sports at an age where body confidence is often lowest (Rogol et al., 2002), saying: At this level, it's supposed to be about inclusivity, you know? And yeah, we're doing the opposite. And the fact that, of course, only girls teams are the target is just laughable” (P23).

Teachers shared examples of girls who had already decided not to play sports out of fear of being challenged, saying:

I have heard… Of students who have shied… female students who've shied away from sports because they're worried that they'll be challenged, because they… they look more androgynous, maybe? They present more androgynous than… than some of the other… student athletes, and that's this… fear and strange shame cycle that seems to come up with these policies. (P30)

Teachers were concerned about how the ability to challenge a girl would impact overall participation in girls sports:

I definitely worry about parents being emboldened like watching the girls sports teams and then calling on girls that aren't as feminine, presenting like that, like that is just such like it makes me sick to my stomach that that's the direction that's going. I just it. It is going to decrease. (P10)

The participants understood that self-confidence is already difficult in adolescence:

Like, as a teenager. Self-esteem is already an issue for a lot of people, and some people are more and less attractive, or meet the norms, or things like that, and I just can't even imagine how that would feel if that you got called out for that. (P24)

They also shared how they felt disgusted by being asked to be involved with tracking young girls' bodies:

That's the aspect that's affected me most, just knowing that, I'll be expected to… police young women's bodies, to ensure that, they are, in fact, or were, were, in fact, assigned female at birth. And that's, like, I think pretty gross. (P16)

The participants felt that the new legislation targeted only girls' sports and would prevent many girls from playing sports due to the impending threat of a challenge.

Removal of books. Ministerial Order 030/2025 mandated the cataloguing and removal of books with sexual content, including implicit content before high school, and many teachers felt indignation at being asked to add more labour to their job in September and at the question of their professional judgment regarding classroom resources that they had purchased with their own funds. All teachers were met with procedures upon their return to school: “We all got some variation of the same presentation [...] saying that every book that exists in our library, and then in our own classrooms, needs to be cataloged by October, and then you can't use things until they're approved” (P10). One teacher spoke to how previous labels of the government as authoritarian were harder to dismiss with this order: “Unfortunately, what I feared out of those things happening are now starting to come to fruition, where we're seeing book bans and small group consultations and ministerial orders being passed really abruptly without maybe full community engagement” (P5).

Many teachers were being asked to catalogue resources that did not belong to the school as they had used their own salary to purchase their classroom library:

What is happening, though, is I, as a language arts teacher, have a bunch of books that I have purchased, you know, from, you know, thrift stores from all over the place. You know, books that I've had since I was in junior high, that I've donated to my classroom library books that you know, friends have donated, and now that library is now having to undergo a cataloging process that needs to be done. (P13)

This removal of resources was being juxtaposed against a perceived underfunding of education:

We've got students learning in schools that don't have windows right, like things like that. Yet, we're pulling books off the shelves when I've got, or we're moving, where we're moving resources, when we can't even put the right resources in place to encourage and engage healthy student learning conditions and environments, but we're pulling something that might give them an outlet or, or a world where they might actually see themselves in a learning environment, because we can't offer it in another space, and now we're taking that away. (P5)

They spoke to the frustration of literally taking books out of students’ hands:

Literally one day in the hall, she was coming back from a classroom where she had gone to the class to, like, get books back from children, that a kid had come to borrow it, and then when that kid was trying to borrow it, she was like, oh, you shouldn't have this book, and they said, oh, my friends took it out, and then she, like, literally went to the class to take these books away from children, and I was like, oh, this is, like, a really... really shitty position that you have been put in. (P26)

They also felt that the book ban had been designed to target certain types of stories, specifically featuring queer and trans characters.

It was just very clear to me that there was a certain type of book that was being targeted, and they couldn't outrightly say it, so they did the best they could without saying it, but all of us English teachers are very good at reading between the lines, so we read between the lines, and yeah, it was just... I was like, gahhh! it felt like it was just really targeting of any sort of, like, story of a minority, like, any LGBTQ2S plus like, narrative out there. Anything that was not, like, white, Christian, normal, heterosexual. (P14)

And it became really clear to me that it had nothing to do with graphic, sexual, explicit sexual references in libraries. It just had, it seemed like it was just these, these books targeted at, you know, queer and trans youth. So it's like, just say, if that's what your problem is, that's your problem, because that seems to be the only problem. (P23)

Teachers wondered if any book featuring a queer or trans character would be questioned, including those with no sexual content:

I asked the question, what about the book, and Tango makes three? which is a read aloud I might have done. But now would not... maybe would not have met their requirements, and so there was a lot of... from our administrators who are just reiterating what they heard from district office, who are just reiterating what they heard from the ministry, there were a lot of unanswered questions. (P18)

Ministerial Order 030/2025 had compounded teachers' workload, placed them in a professional dilemma to remove resources from under-resourced classrooms, and left them questioning which identities would be read as inherently sexual therefore considered inappropriate by the Ministry of Education and the broader public. Despite the minister modifying the order after massive public outcry, the impact on eroding the professionalism of teachers remained for many of the participants.

Sexual orientation and gender identity topics. The addition of sexual orientation and gender identity as opt-in topics created a culture of fear and uncertainty. Generally, teachers felt that the law was vaguely written and open to overinterpretation. As the Language Arts curriculum focuses heavily on themes of coming of age and identity, they were unclear as to what was and was not considered an element of these topics. One teacher summarized this sentiment by saying:

I know the law is about materials pertaining to sexuality, but I feel like people are only interpreting that as gay as a sexuality, but straight isn't right. Nobody asks, Can I have a picture of me and my husband in our straight marriage out, right? So people are already just interpreting it in this, like, homophobic way. (P8)

Another teacher explained that queer and trans stories and topics simply reflect the lived experiences of the student body, and therefore need to be talked about and represented in the classroom:

But if you look at the students in the class, like for some of them, it's not an ideology, it's just, it's just reality, right? I have a guy in my class, in one of my language arts classes that has two moms, right? And the fact that that's like, now something that like, I now, I'm like, curious what that's going to look like, or like, what about the staff we have, right? (P13)

Some questioned the absurdity behind the notion of banning these topics, for example: “You know, if reading a book about a queer character would make you gay, then there'd be no gay people, because all we had for so long was, heteronormative people, and it did not turn my brother into a heterosexual” (P22). Although the Ministry of Education now required all third-party resources on these topics to be vetted through the ministry, one teacher noticed that none had yet been approved, saying: “I went on to the Alberta resource for approved resources, clicked every tab possible, opened it as big as possible, and just put in the word gender, and there was zero resources” (P10).

Teachers also felt a sense of dis-ease as to how to intervene when bullying happened in their classroom. As most bullying in schools is related to marginalized identities, including queer and trans identities (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024; Lambe et al., 2025), teachers often will interrupt harassment with a teachable moment. With the addition of gender orientation and sexual identity as opt-in topics, teachers felt unsure about how they could intervene when bullying happened:

I'm kind of now a bit like, what am I allowed to say? What am I, you know? Is it just like, okay, you know, it's like, what do you I don't know, or if somebody says a homophobic or transphobic remark, I have experienced that before in class, and I've been very confident in shutting it down in the past. And now I'm concerned about, like, what does it look like to shut down transphobic or homophobic or, um, or, yeah, just like derogatory remarks. Is that going to become problematic? (P13)

One of the participants was able to meet with a representative from the Ministry. In this meeting, they were trying to understand what was and was not allowed to be taught in alignment with the themes of identity from the Language Arts curriculum. Their colleague asked the representative for a definition of gender identity, as it was unclear how the government was taking this up. The representative responded that “the gender identity piece is really more in relation to kind of human sexuality and biology…[T]his government's kind of intention around gender identity […] has to do more with […] the gender reassignment piece” (P29). This teacher was frustrated as to the explicit discrimination in this definition from the government official. They further prodded, to understand the depths of the discrimination: “We kept saying, is gender identity this? And then she said, no. Is it this? No. And she said, that's not really what we're talking about. And there was one point where she did say, but that's not… it's not gender reassignment” (P29).

Educators felt that the broad terms of gender identity and sexual orientation left room for overinterpretation in discriminatory ways from the larger public, and many therefore changed their practices towards diverse texts and anti-bullying efforts. Based on one participant’s discussions with a ministry of education representative, the policy was meant to be interpreted in a discriminatory way.

Variations in implementation

Level of ensuring student consent. Although this report has demonstrated that the implementation of Bills 27, 29, and Ministerial Order 030/2025 has been discriminatory in all the participant regions represented, there have also been nuances in the ways in which individual boards have developed local policies and guidelines.

The first nuance is surrounding involving youth in the process of outing them to their guardians. As established, all teachers were told they must engage in this practice. However, some school boards created explicit and detailed policies that ensured that students had agency over whether or not they would like to proceed with a name or pronoun change. For example, one teacher stated that in their school division, they were told:

To kind of keep the child in the loop of it by saying, Hey, this is where we're at legally, that we have to do this. Would you like to withdraw your consent? Or would you like to withdraw your request? So at the very least, at least that's keeping kids who would be potentially in like a dangerous position at home, at least that's temporarily keeping their immediate safety? (P13)

Another teacher spoke to a similar measure of student agency in their school division's procedures:

So there are lots of, you know, safeguards in place to make sure that the child is given every opportunity and is always in charge of what's happening. So if that child says, yes, I want to go by these different pronouns and by this name, that they're given supports.
And at any point, they can back out and say, actually, I don't want my parents to be informed about this. But it could be an opportunity for staff to help facilitate a coming out. (P17)

School authorities and administrators also showed variation in their interpretation of the language of a name change in the legislation.

Many attempted to shield youth from being involuntarily outed through a grandfathering approach to names and pronouns, for example: “I don't know how much of this is bending the rules by my principal and administration. But they said ‘anyone who's already shared their pronouns or a name, you know, we don't need to worry about that’ ” (P30).

This nuance shows that school leaders and school authorities have the ability to interpret the vaguely worded policy in the most generous ways to protect children’s autonomy.

Who informs guardians. There was also a variation amongst divisions as to who was expected to inform parents of a student’s request for a different name or pronoun. Some schools left this up to the individual teacher, saying that the only reason that administrators or counselling needed to be involved was if the teacher assumed that the child would be unsafe. Conversely, some boards also ensured that it was not left to individual teachers to manage these conversations, and instead a school counsellor or an administrator. For example, one educator said:

You know, they explained it to us. They said that they would. They weren't expecting teachers to phone parents and quote unquote alert them that their child is using a different
pronoun than what's on the Power School. They did say, ‘hey, we will handle like those conversations.’ (P13)

This was repeated in another board: “the principal [...] has made it very clear that she's the one who's supposed to be like, implementing everything. So we're not, I was told, I'm not supposed to have conversations with kids, with families, with teachers about any of this. I have to just direct them to her” (P8).

This, however, occasionally left teachers feeling that no one was certain about what the procedures would be:

They outlined the rules, like a student is… they're under 16, they tell you their name and pronouns, you tell them… you send them to the counselor. That was their answer. You just send them to the counselor. And, if they're over 17 and 18, they do that. You also send them to the counselor. And the counselors didn't know that this was the plan either, so it was a… it was quite upsetting. A lot of staff were upset because, they're very… Passionate about this issue, and it felt very rushed and uninformed. (P15)

Of the participants interviewed, teachers tended to appreciate working under policy where they were clearly not individually responsible for outing students to their families.

Detailed policy documents. The participants spoke to the frustration of the vagueness of the provincial legislation. They felt that this left room for overinterpretation and overcompliance, for example saying, “it has gotten increasingly more vague and hard to figure out where your rights actually are” (P12). They spoke to the fact that it was not only teachers who were feeling worried about these policies:

Leadership is so… is so anxious about it. Like, principals are so anxious about it, and they're not getting enough guidance and direction. It's falling on teachers' shoulders, it's falling on leadership's shoulders, because there's not enough guidance from the Ministry and from the school boards, and that's from even before these bills were proposed, right? (P11)

Some felt that the lack of clear policy from their boards was detrimental and causing confusion. For example, one administrator said:

And so, teachers… so… and in a year of a whole lot of uncertainty, we have a whole lot of uncertainty that we don't have answers to, and we just keep trying to reassure our staff that more information will come, but we are waiting on the district to provide us, and we're basically telling staff that the district is putting together approved resources for us. (P27)

Another educator spoke to the dangers of a loosely worded policy: “Initially, the interpretation, we were really worried in the English department, because we didn't know what we'd be able to teach […] Part of it is it's really poorly worded policy and caused a lot of confusion” (P30).

On the other hand, some boards had developed policies that were explicitly detailed. One educator shared:

The division gave us some direction, and we got, like, a flow chart. that was created… that's like, if a student comes out, these are, like, basically what you do. And so it was a little bit more clear, but it… we were basically directed, like, you can't… you can't call them those things. You can't call them what they're asking unless you get consent, and you can collaborate with your admin or counselors on how to do that, but, like, that's the law, basically. (P15)

Although this educator was frustrated with the provincial legislation, they felt that the specific flowchart helped to ensure that staff were not overinterpreting the policy in harmful ways.

One school authority even included students in the development of their policy:

when this happened, thankfully we had a lot of that stuff already made, and made, like, by students over the course of a whole year, so they were able to … I mean, like, we still feel a little bit, like, weird about it, because it was made such beautifully, and then we had to shove it into this narrow box, but, I think that really helped the school, like, create policy that was worded in a way that felt as good as it could feel in the circumstances. (P29)

Specifically worded policies that did not overinterpret the broad legislation and included queer and trans youth input, although still believed to be harmful by the participants, were seen as a layer of protection for themselves and their students.

Educator reactions

Perceptions of the profession. The teacher participants overwhelmingly felt that the legislative changes represented one element of a multi-pronged attack on their profession. Many spoke to funding constraints, top-down overreach, and mistrust as coordinated elements meant to undermine the Association.
For example, one stated: “we all feel very attacked right now with, like, the strike looming and everything else, and now them, you know, a government who has no money to spend on classrooms is now using it to buy advertising time so they can, like, demonize us in the public” (P23).

Another participant elaborated on this idea:

The amount of work that they're asking us to do. And again, we're just so angry that they're igniting this fear in the public, mistrust of teachers, mistrust of the books that we would bring into our classroom. And it's fanning this flame of... of just mistrust, and of course, it goes without saying. That... it's funny how this is coming up. In a bargaining year, and very likely a striking situation, to further erode, or to pre-erode, the public's faith and support in us. (P18)

Another shared that teachers felt fearful in the current education context in Alberta:

Just people are scared, I guess maybe, or they're just like, you know, we've been asked to, like, do so many things and roll with the punches this whole time. So maybe it's good timing for them to, like, roll out these kind of rules where they're just like, it's almost like that covid time when they were changing the law every week, yes, like, training for like, we're just gonna throw new laws at you. (P6)

Some educators spoke of how they felt that welcoming all children was at the crux of the profession, and that this practice was being eroded through these new policies. For example, one teacher shared:

But I think more and more, I'm a little bit anxious about about losing my job, because I love my job. And it's also a place where I have an opportunity to really make a difference for kids and really stand up and protect them, you know. So it's, it's not something that I want to risk or lose, but I have to walk that line between being absolutely willing to risk it and lose it. (P7)

In general, teachers seemed to share the sense that they were “feeling pretty hopeless, lots of despair” (P23). These feelings of fear were juxtaposed against their commitment to not harm children, summarized by one participant who said: “we've opened this up to unnecessary scrutiny that I think the teachers are afraid because they don't want to get in trouble, but they also, there's also this abundance of caution, of like, we don't want to get any kids in trouble.”

Queer and trans staff. Queer and trans teachers seemed to be impacted in compounding ways by the new legislation. Many felt that they already had targets on their backs for discipline from public complaints. One teacher shared that “being a queer teacher, it's made me more fearful. I would say, like, double think about what I'm gonna say, the text that I'm gonna have in my library” (P28). Another teacher stated: “I definitely am not as out as I used to be, like around my students. [...] I definitely don't, you know, talk about it as openly anymore, just because of my just because of, I don't know, my own self preservation, I guess” (P2). Another teacher elaborated:

I had gotten kind of a warning from my principal and vice principal that they had a meeting, and he said, if it's a policy, we have to enforce it around the pronoun stuff. And then it was kind of hinted that I might be under a bit of a microscope for being a queer teacher and for being pretty vocal about No, I simply will not [misgender students]. (P1)

Another teacher spoke to the overinterpretation of the Bills: “A teacher put up her hand and said, Can I have a photo up of my non traditional family? And the principal said, I don't know, which, to me, is a huge over overreach” (P5). One educator explained how the circulating discourse encouraged by this legislation was beginning to affect him:

I'm sensitive as a queer teacher within the grooming narrative, and how I am conscious of every single action, knowing that all it takes is one misstep for a bigoted nature that is a low common denominator political grab of buzzwords. So, it's buzzwords, it's coded buzzwords designed to... to create anger, designed to appeal to a vote base that I think the government has lost control of it and is just trying to satiate. (P25)

A trans participant also shared that they were worried that Bill 27 would not allow them to talk about their very existence:

When the Education Amendment Act happened, and there was, like, the, if you're talking primarily and explicitly about gender identity, you need the consent, it was immediately like, there's all of the things, you're like, this is bad for all of these reasons, and then… I was also like, okay, what does this mean for me also? Right? And that isn't a conversation that I can, like, have with - there aren't people that I know who are in the same situation, like, I don't know other trans teachers. (P29)

Although all of the participating teachers have had their practices impacted by this legislation, queer and trans teachers experienced increased scrutiny and discipline under anti-queer and anti-trans legislative contexts, even if they were not explicitly named in the legislation.

Impact on youth. All of the teachers interviewed, especially those who self-identified as queer and trans, felt that their profession and their work to create inclusive spaces was under attack through the implementation of these legislative changes. However, educators worried most about the impact on their students. One teacher shared a personal and devastating experience:

The background for me in feeling very strongly about that, and my conviction for my willingness to put myself at risk for that, is that I had a student in junior high a few years ago at a different school, came out to her family as gay, and they, according to her sister, were not receptive to that. They said, No, you're not, you can't be. That's not okay. And shortly after that, she took her life. That broke my heart, partly because she gave me a warning sign. She came and told me about a week before, Mr. [name] you have always been, one of my favorite teachers, and looking back it, it was a very obvious like, kind of saying goodbye thing and sort of making that final connection, and that really upset me, and I still carry that. (P7)

Some teachers felt this would actually distance parents from being included in their child's exploration of identity as it had driven a wedge between school and parents, where students might no longer feel safe to come out to teachers who could help them with conversations with their families:

I'm fearful because some of my students are minors,[...] and I can think of, um... trans students who are transitioning, who had loving, but I would say, like, a little bit reluctant parents. This was all very new to them, and they really needed the support of the school. (P12)

This teacher felt that the previous policies allowed for better inclusion of families in those conversations as they weren't under such intense political scrutiny.

Teachers who led Gay- Straight Alliances also noticed a change in students' comfort level of attending these clubs:

One of my colleagues, who's also social studies teacher, is the advisor for the GSA in our school, and so she, you know, expressed a lot of concern about her group, and her group is just dwindling to the point where I think I don't know if it was the first meeting this year or the last meeting last year, but it was like, one student or something. She's like, we know these students are here, you know, is this indicative of them feeling like, like they don't have a safe place, right? (P23)

Many teachers also felt that these legislative changes would impact classroom dynamics. For example, one teacher shared:

So then, instead of me giving like a pronouns lesson to my kids at the beginning, when they're like, what's this, and explaining it and hopefully building some empathy with students that that may have never met a trans or non binary peer, they understand it, but now it's it's kind of just like hidden in there, versus being able to just be a thing that we talk about, because there's folks that exist everywhere in the world that that potentially identify this way. And if we want to be open, open and welcoming and inclusive, then these are the things we just need to know for the world around us. (P10)

All of the teachers interviewed felt that the policies were an attack on the rights of the child or on children's autonomy. One educator elaborated:

It's absolutely taking away a lot of their agency, like, if, if, if, if they don't have a space at school where they're safe, to try out, like, different hats and names and identities, like, you know, where, where can they do that, you know? […] It's also really significant to learn about different people like, and this goes to inclusion, to the whole like, whether or not you should have a kid with autism in your class because they might be slower at talking, or something like, as humans, we need to get used to being around all sorts of different people and and that goes for gender. (P20)

Most teachers also had a sense that homophobia and transphobia were becoming more socially acceptable, or that rhetoric was becoming “more hostile in general” (P27) with the implementation of these policies:

the rhetoric that was started by this government, without even putting a law into place. Just the discussions have led to more homophobia and more transphobia and less inclusion in schools And in society. We look to these people who are supposed to be leaders, who are in positions of power, who form our laws. And when they don't support our most vulnerable populations, kids. How can we expect anyone else to be inclusive and support these vulnerable people? (P17)

Although Bills 27, 29 and Ministerial Order 030/2025 seemed to target queer and trans youth most explicitly, educators felt that the negative impacts of the bills would extend to all students in their schools through increased harassment, feelings of shame about their body, a break-down in classroom inclusion and harmony, reduced richness in texts and subject matter, and limited communication with trusted adults.

Recommendations

After less than three months of their implementation, these legislative changes have already produced lasting damages that extend beyond the classroom. The Alberta government has fanned the flames of hatred by targeting a community that does not present a problem in the first place. Queer and trans youth provide a richness to society that extends our collective imagination. They have always been in Alberta and they will always be in Alberta. The research team believes that the Bills should not only be repealed, but that the Alberta Government will need to engage in intensive reconciliatory dialogue with queer and trans youth, educators, and the broader public alike for years to come. While we fight for that day to be sooner, we would like to propose several harm reduction strategies to school authorities. As demonstrated by the participant data, local school authorities play a significant role in the interpretation of provincial policies. The following recommendations are conclusions derived directly from the research.

1. Detailed local policy that does not over-interpret provincial policy

Due to circulating misinformation concerning trans youth, those looking for their school's local policy must be able to easily find it. This policy should elaborate multiple specific examples, that also do not over-interpret the law. For example, when the amended Education Act mentions incidental or indirect mention, school boards should interpret this with the broadest sense of what can be included as incidental or indirect, and provide specific examples of what is therefore permissible. Providing educators with multiple concrete examples of green flags, rather than prohibited topics, would allow teachers to confidently engage in anti-harassment discussions in their classrooms and decrease general uncertainty leading to extra work and distress.

Teachers also mentioned that visuals, such as flow charts, were helpful. When these legislative changes first appeared, many boards felt uncomfortable explicitly demonstrating how they would be outing students. Although this process is harmful and discriminatory, it is even more harmful when done in an uncontrolled way and before absolutely necessary as required by the legislation. Visuals and specifics help prevent educators from pre-emptively outing a student when it is not necessary or in a dangerous situation.

2. Student consent at each moment

Throughout every layer of local policy, school authorities should include individual students in the process. Student autonomy and consent can still be incorporated into the new policies, despite their removal of full autonomy. For example, when a student requests to use a new name or pronoun, they should first be informed of their rights. They should be reminded that according to the provincial legislation, it is only if these changes are related to their gender identity that a guardian will need to be contacted (and provide consent for under 16). Then, the student can determine themselves whether or not the change is related to their gender identity. Next, they can be involved in decision making with how and when their guardians will be contacted if they would like to proceed with the change. This can allow them to make a safety plan with assistance from the school, and possibly even allow them to have that conversation with their guardians before the school does.

3. Advisory board

As the research team hypothesizes that Albertans may see intensified versions of these policies in the near future, it is essential that school authorities establish an advisory board of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and a separate board of 2SLGBTQIA+ staff. This advisory board can help guide decision making based on lived experience. Queer and trans students are at the heart of these policies, and their voices must be heard in formalized and continuous ways and included in discussions that will impact their well-being. Queer and trans staff also experience these policies in intensified and unique ways from their colleagues and should be consulted when making decisions surrounding the policy and its disciplinary processes.

4. Resisting repathologization

The research report demonstrated earlier that many schools deferred the task of contacting families with name changes to the school counsellor. This practice, although it removes the burden of contacting families from the work of the teacher, works to further pathologize queer and trans youth as they are constantly being referred to counselling. Although ensuring student safety is vital under these policies that mandate the outing of students to their family members before they may be ready to do so themselves, schools should remain vigilant about this repathologization. The backlash on queer and trans rights is a reactionary response to increased visibility of a community that is thriving and joyful, and these policies serve to reproduce narratives of damage and deficit for queer and trans youth. School authorities should use extreme caution when developing policies in order to ensure that they do not mobilize discourses of riskiness and mental illness for queer and trans youth.

Conclusion

This research study has shown the discriminatory interpretation, implementation, and impact of Bills 27, 29 and Ministerial Order 030/2025 since their entry into force in September, 2025. As the school year continues and this legislation attempts to shield itself from a legal challenge through the use of the notwithstanding clause, the evidence remains: recognition and celebration of gender diverse and queer youth remains a site of paramount consideration and work to ensure schools' legal imperative of establishing and maintaining safe and caring spaces. Despite these legislative changes, many educators expressed unwavering support for their students. School authorities and teachers alike can find inspiration in the nuanced and creative practices of their colleagues in the ways in which they continue to welcome each and every student in their spaces. Ultimately, educators are bound by multiple other forms of legislation, as well as their own moral imperatives, to reduce harm in schools under policies that are hostile towards children.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Joelle Tymchuk and Megan Girard for their tireless and meticulous work in data collection and analysis for this report.
Thank you to each and every participant, and classroom teacher, who is working to create safe spaces under difficult conditions. Your work matters more than you will ever know.

Suggested citation

Robinson, G. (2025). *Back-to-School Culture of Fear: Research Report on the Implementation of Alberta's Bill 27, Bill 29 and Ministerial Order 030/2025*. University of Alberta.

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