



Oh hi! It's the Gegi Starter Kit!

Welcome to the first edition of the **Gegi Starter Kit** – a collection of printable resources hosted on **gegi.ca**! We created **gegi.ca** following our study of how Ontario school boards are responding to their new legal responsibilities to offer an environment free from two *separate* forms of discrimination: for who you are gender-wise (your gender identity), and how you let others know through things like your clothing, grooming, and behaviour (your gender expression). We discovered that many school boards have begun to make changes across their policy portfolio, but many have not, and we have heard that many school staff don't yet understand what these changes require even if their hearts are in the right place. **gegi.ca** was created to empower thousands of K-12 students across Ontario to self-advocate for their gender expression and gender identity human rights within their very own schools, using knowledge and skills that are typically only held by legal professionals.

Beginning in Fall 2021, **gegi.ca** will host a suite of resources to support students in planning and managing their advocacy process, including telling their story, aligning what they have experienced with caselaw and policies, countering claims of 'undue hardship' in response to needed changes, and tracking action steps. Right now, each Ontario school board has dedicated Student and Staff web pages on **gegi.ca**. We also offer a series of downloadable and concise resources containing the most up-to-date law- and research-informed guidance we can provide on the changes required to fulfill every school's duty to create a learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of gender expression or gender identity. The **Gegi Starter Kit** contains:

- Gegi's Tips for Welcoming Gender Diversity in Your **Classroom**
- Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly School **Washrooms**
- Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly School **Athletics**
- Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly Overnight **Field Trips**
- Three one-page accessible **summaries of our research articles**, which share findings from our study of how Ontario public and Catholic school boards are responding to the addition of gender expression and gender identity as protected grounds in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*
- The inaugural Gegi **colouring page**

We invite you to visit **gegi.ca**, access and share our resources, review your school board's pages, and let us know if any updates are needed (hooray!) using the Contact tool. Thank you for reading, and Gegi (our friend in the top left corner) really hopes they will get to meet you some day.

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Gegi's Tips for Creating a Classroom that Welcomes and Sustains Gender Diversity

Adapted from Dr. Lee Airton's books *Gender: Your Guide* (www.genderyourguide.com) and *Teaching about Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K-12 Classrooms* (www.genderdiversitycurriculum.com) edited with Dr. Susan Woolley, as well as their *Education Canada* article (<https://www.edcan.ca/articles/gender-friendly-classroom/>).

1. Teach as though there is always gender diversity in the room. Do not wait to change or add to your practice until you know *for sure* that you have a transgender student. Rather, each year from go, assume that some of your students are (invisibly) transgender, may be gender conforming at school but not outside of school, may have transgender and/or gender nonconforming family members or friends, may come to understand themselves as transgender later in life, and so on.

2. Show, not just tell, your students and their loved ones that you are here for this. When you introduce yourself on the first day of school, or send home an email to introduce yourself to students, include your own pronouns (even and perhaps especially if no one has ever gotten them wrong). In bulletins about special events or upcoming field trips, source and include information on washrooms, including accessible and all-gender options. These small things will be overlooked by many, but for those who need them in order to stay and be okay, they will shine like a beacon.

3. Honour all students as the authority on who they are, starting with their names. For many people under the transgender umbrella, the information present in (and absent from) our school record tells an incorrect story of who we are. It is a good idea to just take the standard "roll call" right off the table. Some teachers have students create name tags right away with their preferred name (and sometimes pronouns—more on this below), which students collect upon entering the room each day and have the right to alter as needed (while letting the teacher know). A first-day strategy is having students share their preferred names (and sometimes pronouns) during a quick go-around, with you writing them down for now and later comparing them with the attendance list when the students are occupied (which means incorporating this time into your plan). If there are preferred names that you cannot attach to a listed name, you can then ask students more privately as needed.

4. Maintain a resource binder with a loud and proud label, and display it in a prominent place in the classroom. Include information on accessible, free, and both local in-person or online supports related to various groups and communities your students could be part of (remembering tip number one above), and include supports related to gender and sexual diversity. Include things that are age-appropriate and culturally responsive, taking your students' social positions into account (e.g., spoken language, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.). Talk about these supports often and remind students that the binder is there. **gegi.ca** has plenty of resources, links to external resources, and an entire page dedicated to local resources and supports in/around your (Ontario) school board.



5. Begin to see your classroom through a gender lens. Whether consciously or not, school-age children and youth are constantly accessing local gender norms (i.e., invisible standards for what boys or girls should do, look like, etc.) as they negotiate power, belonging, and popularity. In your classroom, there are students whom you might think of as ‘power centres,’ or, boys or girls who are highly sought-after as play partners, buddies, friends, dates or crushes. Conversely, there are students who are on the ‘opposite’ end of the power spectrum, to the extent that other students do not want to be associated with them (e.g., as table or team mates). Very often, students who do not do gender like the others (whether or not they come to understand themselves as transgender) are in the latter group. Monitoring how students react to each other when, for example, you group students together for an activity, is a powerful way to see how gender is operating in your classroom. This sort of classroom power dynamic analysis can help you recognize a pattern of gender expression discrimination, which can look like what many teachers might think of as frivolous conflict.

6. Position students as active participants in creating and sustaining your community. Gegi recommends that teachers interested in welcoming and sustaining gender diversity integrate mindfulness practices into their classroom routine, and establish restorative conflict resolution practices, so that students can learn to articulate needs and boundaries in a positive way. This work might include working with students to create agreements about your classroom community, including themes of basic respect for others as well as an openness toward topics and ideas with which students (and perhaps you as the teacher) are not yet familiar, or that make them uncomfortable. What does this have to do with gender, you say? Well, learning to recognize and take care of one’s discomfort in a positive way helps one to react neutrally to information one did not expect, gender-wise, from others. And setting boundaries about one’s personal space, and expressing this positively, is a hop-skip-and-jump away from articulating one’s pronouns, gendered interests, or preferred name.

7. Notice and change the language you use. Using gender-inclusive language (e.g., students or children instead of boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, etc.) indicates your expectation that students will arrive who are doing gender in unexpected ways, or that a student’s gender is not the most important way in which they exist or interact within your classroom. In some situations this may also mean not assuming the gender of a student and assigning them he or she gender pronouns without getting to know them and how they refer to themselves (you can also start saying ‘themselves’ instead of ‘themselves,’ which is one way in which Standard English is mainstreaming singular they/them as a personal pronoun of reference). You can also start ‘hedging’ blanket statements about women, men, boys, and girls (e.g., “some women have breasts and a uterus,” where *some* is the hedge). Lastly, you can simply do these things, or you can *not* do them ‘by accident’ and then ‘correct yourself’ in order to make them visible to students in a teachable moment about our changing world of gender.

8. Practice using gender-neutral pronouns *before* you have a student who has gender-neutral personal pronouns. A growing number of younger transgender people have gender-neutral personal pronouns, most likely singular they/them (e.g., “Lee is getting their lunch but will be back in a second”), which reflects a nonbinary understanding of one’s gender: as neither neatly man *or* woman, boy *or* girl. If you have not already encountered a nonbinary student in your school, you will. Getting

ready means practicing singular they/them in advance. You already do this for a single individual you do not know (e.g., “FedEx came by, but I don’t know where they left my package,” where ‘they’ refers to the driver). Begin consciously using they/them to refer to people who you *do* know, but for whom gender is irrelevant to the topic at hand. Replace ‘he or she’ with ‘they’ in everyday speech and written communication. There is much more pronoun support in Dr. Lee Airton’s book *Gender: Your Guide*.

9. Make space for *every* student’s relationship with their gender to be voiced and explored (whether they are transgender or not). Gender norms are a source of anxiety for all students at one time or another, including cisgender (non-transgender) boys and girls. It is common for all young people to live or express their gender differently from parent or community standards, or to question whether and how they want to participate in their community’s gendered milestones or traditions. Every girl or woman’s degree and experience of femininity will fluctuate across time, and the same is true of boys and men in terms of masculinity. Creating opportunities for *all* students to talk about gender, to think about and share what they love or don’t love or don’t care about being a girl or a boy, for example, takes the heat off transgender and gender non-conforming students when gender topics come up. Don’t position the latter as ‘the experts’ on transgender people, whether by calling on them or making meaningful eye contact. Rather, let them decide when and how to participate.

10. Practice articulating that one of your legal responsibilities is mitigating gender-based discrimination in your classroom and school. In Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories, creating a learning environment free from discrimination on the grounds of gender expression and gender identity is part of your job. In fact, doing otherwise would not be doing your job. While *how* you exercise this responsibility is a matter of your professional judgment, taking into account who your learners are and what they bring with them, welcoming gender diversity is part of your professional and legal responsibility (assuming you teach in a publicly-funded school). To the best of your ability, enter difficult conversations at work with an ‘of course,’ i.e., of course we are on the same page here, and this is all of our legal responsibility. Locating and quoting from your (Ontario) school board’s relevant policy documents (catalogued at gegi.ca) is a complementary strategy.

11. Defend your gender diversity-affirmative practices through connection, not polarization. Something many teachers find useful is walking beside parents (etc.) who are struggling with gender diversity-affirmative teaching; this happens when you situate this practice as one of many similar ways in which you support your students and their families. Be ready to offer concrete examples of how your classroom practices directly support students in other aspects of who they are (e.g., language spoken, faith, ethnicity, ability), particularly those of the parents (etc.) who have come to you concerned. This care you offer them is just as much a part of your job as the care you are offering to students and families whose ways of doing gender exceed many people’s expectations.



About gegi.ca

gegi.ca is an Ontario-based online knowledge mobilization hub about gender expression and gender identity human rights protections and advocacy created by Dr. Lee Airton (Faculty of Education, Queen’s University), Dr. Kyle Kirkup (Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa) and their research team. For more information, visit www.gegi.ca/about.



Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly School Washrooms

- 1. Learn what gender-based discrimination with regard to washrooms looks like.** In Canadian schools (and other public settings), everyone has the right to use the washroom that they know to be right for them. No one may ask a transgender person (of any age) to use a washroom that does not align with their gender identity or to use an all-gender washroom (if not self-selected), as this is gender identity discrimination. You can learn more about gender identity and gender expression human rights in Ontario at gegi.ca.
- 2. Ask your local experts, or, check in with transgender and/or gender non-conforming students about the washroom situation.** This may include speaking with students directly, but could also involve consulting with teachers (etc.) who have formed trusting relationships with them, or who may know about how gendered facilities are generally experienced by students (e.g., Health and Physical Education teachers). Promptly act on concerns, check in again, and ask for help if you need it. gegi.ca offers resources in/near each school board.
- 3. Ensure that your school has an all-gender washroom available for student use.** In a pinch, this can be one that is also used by staff if it is a single-stall washroom. Staff who use this washroom should be made aware – in a face-to-face conversation with administration, as one more email might not get read – that students may be accessing it, and to not call excess attention to any students who do. Gegi recommends signage without men and women symbols, but with ‘all-gender washroom’ text and a toilet, instead. That is what’s in there, after all!
- 4. Ensure that your school’s student-accessible all-gender washroom does NOT require a key.** Requiring a key places students in the position of having to justify their need to access this washroom. This can place them at risk of being outed to/by staff, and potentially experiencing harm. If the all-gender washroom is being used improperly, another option is installing a time-released lock (with a conspicuous timer and/or signage).
- 5. Make sure school staff understand their obligation to respect student privacy.** Staff may not know why a student is using a particular washroom – whether or not it is an all-gender one shared with staff – and do not get to know why. Students who are transgender and/or who experience washrooms as unsafe places may not be out to staff, and may not present in the ways staff expect. A best practice is to not ask, and simply let be.
- 6. Educate school staff and students about gender expression and gender identity human rights.** This could include posters or other signage reminding staff and students that ‘people in here are the best judge of which washroom is for them’ or similar. Ryerson and McMaster universities have instituted similar campaigns that can serve as models. It is also important to prepare school staff on how to respond to ‘someone-is-in-the-wrong-washroom’ complaints: “are they doing something to make you feel unsafe? No? Then move along and mind your business. If you like, the all-gender washroom is down the hall.”

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Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly School Athletics

1. Learn what gender-based discrimination in school athletics looks like. Every student has the right to participate in athletics, and try out for a team or use a changeroom (etc.) that they know to be right for them, gender-wise. No one may ask a transgender student to try out for a team or join an intramural league that does not align with their gender identity, as this may be gender identity discrimination. Asking transgender students to provide legal or medical documentation in order to participate may also be gender identity discrimination. Once a transgender student has joins team, they may still experience harassment from other players or staff, which by law must be addressed. Because all Ontarians also have gender expression human rights protections, students who aren't transgender but who are gender non-conforming also have the right to play without changing how they express their gender, or wearing a gendered uniform if it does not match their gender expression. You can learn more about gender identity and gender expression human rights in Ontario at gegi.ca.

2. Be honest about your starting place. The world of sport has long been gender-segregated. School athletics staff have likely come up through sport cultures with embedded expectations about performance, fairness, etc. that reference common assumptions about gender and sex. There are a lot of opinions circulating about transgender athletes, but these opinions tend to exist independently of research which, for example, shows greater variation *among* women athletes in terms of performance than *between* men and women. It's likely that staff need professional development in order to work toward a gender-friendly school athletics program, and Gegi recommends opportunities particularly tailored to sport. An exemplar is the training required by the Ontario Hockey Federation (<https://www.ohf.on.ca/coaches/gender-identity-training>).

3. Make a plan. There are transgender students in every school, whether staff know or not. Some are boys, some are girls, some are nonbinary (neither boys or girls), and some are gender-fluid (with a gender identity and/or gender expression that changes). And some of these students are into sports! So, make a plan that prepares staff and keeps them all on the same page. For example, what will you do when a trans boy shows up at a boys' team tryout, or signs up for boys' intramurals? Hint: unless he is facing discrimination or harassment, the answer is 'nothing,' because a transgender student is the only judge of which option (e.g., the boys' team, the girls' team, all-gender intramurals, etc.) is best for them. However, as transgender students often experience harassment at school, including in athletics, it's important for staff to keep an eye out. What will you do when a nonbinary student (i.e., who is neither a boy or a girl) wants to try out? One idea from Thames Valley DSB's (2018) *Supporting trans and gender diverse students and staff* policy is to give that student a choice of one gendered team, per sport, per year (e.g., they can't play on *both* the boys' and girls' soccer teams), but not to hold them to a single gender across different sports (e.g., they may play girls' soccer and boys' basketball). Until there are all-gender athletics in Ontario high schools, this will likely have to be the way.

4. Go out of your way to let transgender and/or gender non-conforming students know that school sports are also for them. Otherwise, they might never show up. Sport is a fraught place for many transgender people. As a result, trans students probably assume that your school's athletics program is not a space where they will be welcome, comfortable, and safe. One way to address this assumption is *showing* that your athletics program, intramurals, etc. are committed to welcoming transgender and/or gender non-conforming students (more on this below). A teacher (etc.) who has formed a trusting relationship with a transgender and/or gender



non-conforming student can also directly check in and ask if they'd like to play a sport, etc. If you know that a trans student's parents or guardians affirm who they are, checking in with them about their student's interest can be a good idea, but this should never replace or supersede the student's own articulation of their needs.

5. Change school culture by visibly, loudly, and unrelentingly showing your support for gender-friendly athletics. Go out of your way as staff to signal, all the time, that you *anticipate* transgender and/or gender non-conforming student-athletes, so a student knows they won't have to do all the heavy-lifting. If there is no related policy in your board, create your own and ensure it is easy to find and readily accessible. Put up signage near washrooms and changerooms which indicate (kindly yet firmly) that people in here are the best judge of where they belong so mind your own business. Staff can model a shift to gender-inclusive language when addressing a team, saying "players" or "team" instead of "ladies" or "gentlemen." Gendered team uniforms can be changed, perhaps in a school-wide design contest that loudly proclaims why this is necessary. If/while gendered team uniforms persist, *every* student can be given the choice of which uniform they'd like to wear. School announcements about athletics tryouts or intramurals can explicitly include a welcome to transgender students. Gegi is confident that you can come up with more ways to show your support, and gegi.ca is here to help!

6. Make sure athletics staff understand their obligation to respect student privacy. Staff may not know why a student is using a particular changeroom – whether or not it is an all-gender one shared with staff – and do not get to know why. Students who are transgender and/or who experience changerooms (and washrooms) as unsafe places may not be out to staff, and may not present in the ways staff expect. A best practice is to not ask, and simply let be. Furthermore, a trans student's experience may or may not include gender-affirming medical treatment, and this is not something they are required to disclose to school staff, under any circumstances. If staff do come to possess medical information about a transgender student, at no point should any trans student be asked medical questions unless these questions directly pertain to their safety (e.g., sprains, concussions, etc.). If you happen to collect any information about a student's gender (including legal name, if applicable), ensure it is kept secure and confidential, as this can be vital to their safety. Quick tip: ask for preferred names on team tryout or intramural sign-up sheets, and ensure all public lists only use preferred names, regardless of what is contained in a student's school record.

7. If a student objects to playing alongside another student because they are transgender, do not penalize the transgender student. Consider how this strategy for addressing 'someone-is-in-the-wrong-washroom' complaints can be applied in the case of athletics: "are they doing something to make you feel unsafe? No? Then move along and mind your business. If you like, the all-gender washroom is down the hall." Here, behaviour, not gender identity, is grounds for removing someone from a space. If a transgender student is playing by the rules of the sport, and with sportsmanship and consideration for others on the field (etc.), they have the right to play on the team that is the best fit for them. If another student objects, they can be supported in identifying another opportunity to play the sport, but their preference to not play alongside a transgender student-athlete has no bearing on whether their transgender peer can play. Bear in mind that perceptions of any athlete's skill are informed by assumptions about their gender (e.g., gender non-conforming or 'more masculine' girls are more likely to be viewed as 'playing rough'). This means that even the most 'objective' complaint about a transgender student-athlete is likely based on misconceptions.



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Gegi's Tips for Gender-Friendly Overnight Field Trips

1. Learn what gender-based discrimination looks like. In Canadian schools and their associated activities, every student has the right to access gender-segregated facilities or housing that they know to be right for them. No one may ask a transgender person (of any age) to stay in gender-segregated housing that does not align with their gender identity or to stay in a private room (if not self-selected), as this is gender identity discrimination. You can learn more about gender identity and gender expression human rights in Ontario at gegi.ca.

2. Do not expect that all transgender students will have the same needs. Some trans boys feel safe and affirmed in boys' washrooms, changing rooms, dorms, etc., and some do not, for many reasons including harassment and violence. The same is true for some trans girls. Some nonbinary students feel comfortable in gendered housing, while others may not. Asking for a private room, or to share a room or be billeted along with a trusted friend or two (regardless of gender identity) can be what a trans student needs right now. This does not make them less of a boy or girl, or less nonbinary, but it can give trans students access to experiences that many students enjoy without thinking. Similarly, a trans student might make the call that being out is too risky for them for the purposes of this trip; that does not mean they are 'less trans' (etc.), and does not alter the school's legal responsibility to provide this student with an environment free from gender identity discrimination. And this call must be the student's alone; any coercion (subtle or overt) may constitute gender identity and/or gender expression discrimination.

3. Examine the itinerary through a gender diversity lens. If gender isn't something staff have had to think much about as individuals, it can come as a shock just how much of everyday life involves binary gender segregation. Does your field trip (whether overnight or no, within Canada or internationally) include spaces where boys/men and girls/women are expected to dress or participate in gender-conforming ways? This includes but is not limited to 'semi-formal' dress required by some restaurants, faith-based settings, performances or ceremonies. In all venues on your itinerary, have you verified that there are all-gender washrooms and changing rooms (if applicable), or at least single-stall ones? If no, what accommodation can you create with venue staff, respecting the privacy and dignity of the student(s) in question? Don't wait until you are on site to let things work themselves out. Instead, discuss any gender segregation and related strategies with transgender students (more tips for checking in below). That said, the best plan is to organize field trips that work for *all* students, and to let potential venues know that you will not be bringing your group (e.g., because they do not have all-gender facilities or contingency plans) in order to encourage change. Lastly, remember that gender non-conforming students who are *not* transgender *also* do not have to dress in gender-conforming ways, and may not be coerced to do so, as this may constitute gender expression discrimination.

4. Long before an upcoming overnight field trip, check in with transgender student participants about housing. The best judge of whether particular housing is best for a student is the student themselves. A teacher (etc.) who has formed a trusting relationship with the student can check in with open-ended questions: "how are you feeling about the trip? Is there anything I can do to make the trip awesome?" This will likely surface housing. If not, being direct is okay: "what kind of housing do you need on *this* trip?" As everyone's relationship to their gender and body changes over time, so too for trans people. Lastly, if you know that a trans student's parents or



guardians affirm who they are, checking in with them can be a good idea, but this should never replace or supersede the student's own articulation of their needs.

5. If a student does not want to bunk with another student because they are transgender, move the former not the latter. Consider how this strategy for addressing 'someone-is-in-the-wrong-washroom' complaints can be applied in the case of overnight field trip housing: "are they doing something to make you feel unsafe? No? Then move along and mind your business. If you like, the all-gender washroom is down the hall." Here, behaviour, not gender identity, is grounds for removing someone from a space. If a transgender student is doing their thing and minding their business, they have the right to be in the best-fit accommodation for them, just like a cisgender (non-trans) student. If another student objects, they can be accommodated elsewhere.

6. Costs associated with providing private or semi-private accommodations, if necessary, should not be borne by transgender students. Not much else to say, as this is very likely to be gender identity discrimination! Chances are there are other families in your school find overnight field trips to be a source of financial strain. Gegi suggests organizing everyone in raising funds to support all participants in needs-based ways.



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What is "Gender Expression"? How a New and Nebulous Human Rights Construct is Taking Shape in Ontario School Board Policy Documents

Lee Airton, Kyle Kirkup,
Allison McMillan, & Jacob DesRochers

What is this article about? How the meaning of gender identity and gender expression human rights protections is being understood and shaped by Ontario public secular school boards.

Why does this matter? GE and GI human rights protections are new in Canadian law, and many people who work in schools do not know what these protections are and what is needed to prevent these two different forms of discrimination.

What did we do? We collected and analyzed every single publicly available Ontario secular school board policy document that contains gender expression (GE) and/or gender identity (GI). That's over 200 documents!

Half of Ontario secular school boards do not have a gender diversity policy.

Gender expression is often left out when protected human rights grounds are listed.

Gender expression and gender identity are in policies about interpersonal student behaviour, not school structures.

Read the article in the Canadian Journal of Education!

<https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/4103>

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The Aftermath of Human Rights Protections: Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and the Socio-Legal Regulation of School Boards

Lee Airton, Kyle Kirkup,
Allison McMillan, & Jacob DesRochers

What is this article about? How the meaning of gender identity and gender expression human rights protections is being understood and shaped by Ontario public secular school boards. **Why does that matter?** GE and GI human rights protections are new in Canadian law, and it is important to follow how they are being interpreted so that people who might be experiencing GE or GI discrimination can know whether their own experiences qualify in order to demand change or access justice. **What did we do?** We compared Ontario Human Rights Tribunal decisions about gender expression (GE) and gender identity (GI) with how Ontario K-12 secular public schools are interpreting them.

Human rights tribunals have excluded some non-transgender people from accessing gender expression protections but without making this a precedent.

Ontario school boards are defining gender expression rights expansively: as something that everyone has, not just transgender people.

Read the article in the Canadian Journal of Law
and Society! doi:10.1017/cls.2020.7

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Toby Goes to Catholic School: Ontario Catholic School Board Policy and the Protection of Gender Expression

Lee Airton, Kyle Kirkup,
Jacob DesRochers, & Lindsay Herriot

What is this article about? How the meaning of gender identity and gender expression human rights protections is being understood and shaped by Ontario Catholic school boards.

Why does this matter? GE and GI human rights protections are new in Canadian law, and these grounds' inclusion in Catholic school policy has been widely covered in media but not studied.

What did we do? We collected and analyzed every single publicly available Ontario public Catholic school board policy document that contains gender expression (GE) and/or gender identity (GI).

Gender expression is often absent and is conflated with the separate ground of gender identity.

Catholic school boards are not providing guidance to school staff on supporting transgender students.

Gender expression protections are misunderstood as being in conflict with Catholic doctrine.

This article is currently under review! Check back soon.

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Colour GEGI

Get creative and give GEGI a fresh new look
(and don't forget to give them a sassy message!)

Share your creation on Instagram #gegi



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