



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.”

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.

