

**Grand Rapids Christian Schools
Board of Trustees**

**Human Sexuality Statement
Frequently Asked Questions**

May 2023

What action was taken by the Board?

The Board modified and incorporated Grand Rapids Christian Schools' 2017 Position Statement on Human Sexuality into the GRCS staff handbook.

Why did the Board take this action?

The Board received legal advice that, due to changes in the law, Grand Rapids Christian Schools needs to have a clear and defined statement on human sexuality if it ever needed to take employment action related to issues of sexual orientation or gender identity.

What was the process the Board went through to make this decision?

The Board charged the Superintendent to appoint an ad hoc committee in March 2022 to review Grand Rapids Christian Schools Position Statement on Human Sexuality within the context of employment-related matters. The committee consisted of the Superintendent, three pastors (Calvin CRC, LaGrave CRC and Ada Bible), two employment lawyers and a human resources professional. The committee met five times and had additional correspondence via email. At the initial meeting, the committee reviewed the 2017 Position Statement, which it learned was not thoroughly reviewed with faculty and staff at that time, and found it to be thoughtful and well-written. The committee decided the best way that it could serve GRCS and the Board would be to review and update the existing Position Statement based on recent developments in the law so that, if GRCS ever needed to make an employment-related decision related to sexual orientation or gender identity, GRCS would have a legally-defensible position.

Throughout the committee's review, the Superintendent kept school principals and district administrative staff informed of the Committee's considerations and met with two representative principals in August 2022 to hear questions and priorities expressed for its consideration. The Committee made revisions to the Statement and presented it to the Board in October 2022. The Board engaged in thoughtful deliberation over the course of multiple meetings and assessed the recommended revisions through a variety of lenses and perspectives.

The revised and further expanded statement was approved by the Board in its December 2022 meeting. The approval process aligned with other actions the Board takes when reviewing and developing policy. There was no effort to cloak this process in secrecy, nor was there any action taken to hide the process or the results.

Were the personal beliefs of the Board or the ad hoc Committee ever discussed?

No, the personal views of the Board and the Committee were not discussed nor are they known. The Board of Trustees, like the GRCS community as a whole, includes a variety of viewpoints on

matters of human sexuality. The Board's vote to include the Statement in the staff handbook is not based on personal views, but on what it believes is in the best interest of GRCS at this time.

Did the Board intend to change the stance of Grand Rapids Christian Schools on this issue?

No, the Board simply intended to clarify the existing Statement and include it in staff documents – in accordance with legal advice.

Does Grand Rapids Christian staff need to agree with the Statement?

No, as recited in the Statement itself, GRCS recognizes that Christians who love Christ and love Scripture differ in their views and scriptural interpretations on issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. *Subscription* to and *agreement* with the *Basis* as found in Section 1.3 of GRCS Bylaws and *adherence* to GRCS policies are what have been and will continue to be required of GRCS faculty and staff. The Board is not trying to dictate students' or parents' beliefs, and this Statement does not interfere with staff members' ordinary expressions of disagreement when not acting in an official employment capacity.

Does the Statement apply to students?

No.

To whom does this position statement and policy apply?

The statement applies to designated staff deemed "Ministers of Christ". Ministers of Christ, defined as those employees involved in the instruction and guidance of our youth, include those classified as district-level and department administrators and principals. It also includes teachers, counselors, coaches, social workers, preschool directors, educational support services and inclusion coordinators, librarians, and instructional aides.

Is the Board asking staff to sign on to the Christian Reformed Church's Human Sexuality Report?

No, the Board began discussion of this policy update before the CRC Synod of 2022. The Board does not ask staff to agree with position statements or confessional interpretations of the CRC or any other denomination.

Does the Board intend to change how teachers interact with children on this issue?

No. The Board understands that this is a difficult and nuanced issue and wants staff to continue to interact with students on this and other issues of sexuality with care, compassion, and understanding. Staff will continue to listen to and guide students who have questions about their sexual identity by assuring them of God's love for them. They will be encouraged to have conversations with their families to understand their family's beliefs in this matter.

The Board reaffirms earlier work done by staff members and the Education Committee to encourage faithful and nuanced instruction around controversial subjects. Teachers, students, and parents each play a role in healthy conversation. The Board reaffirms our commitment as a school to our mission of preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society. Because contemporary society is polarized, being an effective servant of Christ is about navigating these conversations well, with grace and love.

Is the Board open to refining the language in Policy 220 for greater clarity?

In Spring 2023, the Board appreciated hearing from a number of GRCS constituents. Some expressed appreciation for the policy, some called for additional explanation of how the policy is intended to impact the classroom experience, and some expressed concern regarding particular phrases or verbiage in Policy 220 that may be perceived as troubling or harmful to members of the Grand Rapids Christian community. Though the Board will not be changing its stance on Policy 220, we are eager to continue listening and discerning together, with staff and administrators, how best to provide greater clarity to staff and assurance to the full GRCS community of our commitment to foster flourishing for all members of the GRCS community.

How should GRCS teachers engage with students on controversial topics like human sexuality?

Grand Rapids Christian Schools' vision statement acknowledges that we work to cultivate Christian learning environments where students are developed to lead "lives of purpose as living testimonies for Jesus Christ in a broken but hopeful world." The faith perspective that guides this work can be found in [Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony](#), which provides biblical perspective for the entire curriculum.

The Contemporary Testimony asserts that the purpose of education is to enable students to become spiritually wise, world-engaging citizens of God's kingdom. Rooted in a Reformed perspective of education, GRCS sees Christian education as an opportunity to help students—in age appropriate ways—navigate tensions between their faith and the ideas they encounter, as well as tensions within the Christian community about how best to interpret scripture and demonstrate Christ's love to our neighbor. We believe with theologian Abraham Kuyper that over every square inch of human existence, Jesus Christ proclaims "This is Mine." And it is this conviction that allows teachers and students to walk toward difficult and contentious issues with courage and hope. When controversial topics arise in a classroom setting, staff are encouraged to navigate these conversations drawing on their professional competence and the standards of the discipline they are teaching.

Academic freedom makes possible teaching and learning that challenges perspectives, explores new dimensions of God's world and human experience, and allows passionate Christian commitments to develop without coercion. Academic freedom does not, however, allow for individual staff members to express, instruct, or coerce students with their personal views or opinions on controversial and/or partisan issues. The classroom may not serve staff members as a platform for causes that have no relationship to their discipline or teaching subject.

How will GRCS ensure that LGBTQ+ students are cared for and have a sense of belonging?

GRCS professes "Community" as one of its core values and views all students, including LGBTQ+ students, as created in God's image and valued members of this community. As image-bearers, all students are worthy of honor, respect, and dignity. We acknowledge that care alone is not sufficient and strive to build a culture of belonging for all students. GRCS will commit to bringing in knowledgeable speakers and resources around the understanding of the LGBTQ+ community who have experience in working in a Christian community. The Board, in partnership with administrators, staff, and students, will work to further articulate guiding principles and commitments around our care for and inclusion of LGBTQ+ students.

If a staff member is not modeling or aligning their instruction with the School's view on human sexuality, does that mean they could lose their job because of it?

GRCS teachers and staff have always been expected to model behavior and align their instruction with our Christian beliefs. That is unchanged by the Statement. If an individual staff member is engaging in behavior or instruction that does not align with the Statement, or any other School policy, GRCS will address the issue with the staff member with compassion and care in hopes of finding a positive solution. That, too, is unchanged by the Statement.

Where should staff and other constituents go when questions arise related to the policy?

Although the Board is responsible for creation of District policy, building principals and administrators are responsible for the application and execution of these policies in the schools. This includes but is not limited to the creation of parent/student handbooks, application of employment policies, and instructional practices in the classroom. Questions should go to building principals who will seek clarification from the superintendent and Board as needed.

Wouldn't it have been better to just keep the Statement out of the staff handbook and leave this divisive topic alone?

Reasonable minds can certainly differ on this question. The Board prayerfully took this action to protect GRCS if it ever had to take action on these issues. The Board certainly hopes that it will never have to do so. In light of rapidly changing cultural norms, frequently conflicting points of view, and recent changes in the law, the Board believes it was necessary for GRCS to provide clear guidance to both staff and parents regarding GRCS' already existing statement on human sexuality.

With that said, the Board and GRCS commit to respectful dialogue on this and any other difficult topic. We resist and reject the threat that contentious topics may divide and destroy our Christian community. We honor diversity of thought within the context of the Scripture, and we will continue to support the spiritual and mental health of our LGBTQ+ students, as we do all of our students.