

'Awkward situation'

## School board's gender identity policy stirs controversy

The Vancouver school board's attempt to update its policy on students' gender identities has drawn a mix of support and ire from parents, students, doctors and lawyers.

More than 40 people signed up to speak to the gender identity policy at a meeting Wednesday night.

The changes would allow transgender students to use the washrooms and change rooms that align with their gender identities and encourage schools to reduce sex-segregated activities, such as gym or health classes, school board chair Patti Bacchus said Thursday.

But a group of parents expressed concerns there wasn't enough consultation and that the policy wasn't based on opinions from mental health care professionals or doctors. They also argued that the policy's aspect of confidentiality — schools wouldn't necessarily tell parents if their child had a different gender identity during the day — was wrong.

On the other hand, there were stories of children who changed their gender identity being spat on or harassed if they used the washrooms where they felt comfortable, Bacchus said. "We heard stories of students who don't eat or drink all day, they don't want to be put in the awkward situation of having to use the washroom," Bacchus said. "We have an obligation under law to provide supports for students."

The board has scheduled another meeting to hear additional speakers. A decision on the policy is expected in June.

EMILY JACKSON/METRO



UBC PhD student Ajung Moon with a Willow Garage PR2 robot that she and a team are programming to make ethical decisions. JENNIFER GAUTHIER/METRO

# Robots that know right from wrong?

## 'Robo ethics' UBC student developing robots that can be programmed to use logic to make ethical decisions

In what sounds like a scene out of a sci-fi movie, a University of British Columbia student is attempting to teach robots the difference between right and wrong.

Ajung Moon, a third-year PhD student, is working on developing robots that can be programmed to use logic to make ethical decisions and act on it, what she calls "robo ethics." She recently posted her findings on the research

blog Footnote1.

Training robots to do the right thing is a challenging task, Moon said, especially when humans sometimes have a hard time navigating moral dilemmas.

"Human ethics tend to be a very tricky thing to get your head around," she said. "The biggest challenge is ... that not everybody in the world agrees on one particular set of moral principals or ethics."

To get around that barrier, Moon and a team from the Open Roboethics initiative gathered data from people on how they thought a robot should behave. The team put the concept to the test by putting a Willow Garage PR2 robot through an ethical challenge

involving an elevator.

They first carried out a survey, asking people to imagine a scenario where a robot needs to use an elevator but encounters a person inside or someone waiting to get on. If the robot can only ride the elevator alone, the team asked survey respondents how they thought the robot should proceed.

Overall, respondents said the best choice would be for the robot to talk to the person. The least appropriate choice would be to do nothing, they said. If the robot has a non-urgent delivery, the respondents said it should always yield to people.

"People opted for the robot to have a dialogue with the person, to ask the person, 'Are you in a hurry as well?'"

Moon explained.

Moon and her team then programmed the data into the robot.

A video of the results shows the robot always yielding to other people in need of the elevator. The robot only asks the person to get off if it has an urgent delivery, but if the person refuses to exit, it simply waits for the next one.

Moon said the study is important in that it shows the potential for robots to be programmed to interact and work with people.

"As long as we teach them behaviours that have human values and ethics incorporated in them, then the end result will reflect that," she said.

THANDI FLETCHER/METRO

## 10-year contract deal off the table, bonus on in latest B.C. teachers' offer

The B.C. government has ditched its demand for a 10-year teachers' contract and is now offering a six-year deal and a signing bonus if there's an agreement before the end of the school year.

Education Minister Peter Fassbender said details of the latest government offer will be revealed after its chief negotiator, Peter Cameron, makes the

presentation to union officials Friday. B.C. Teachers' Federation president Jim Iker said he hasn't yet seen the proposal, but members are glad the government "has finally seen the error in their ways," although there are still other sticking points at the bargaining table.

After voting 89 per cent in favour of a strike in March, the union is in its first phase of job

action, which includes refusing to supervise students outside class or communicate in writing with administrators.

Fassbender said the six-year term and time-limited signing bonus is meant to signal to teachers, parents, students and trustees that the government wants labour peace before the start of the new school year.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

## Surrey. One man dead, one in custody in fatal stabbing

A man is dead and another is in police custody after a fatal stabbing in Surrey late Wednesday.

Shortly before 10 p.m., Surrey RCMP were called to a home in the 9300 block of 132 Street following reports of a disturbance, said Sgt. Adam MacIntosh of the Integrated Homicide Investigative Team.

Police found a 39-year-old Hispanic man with serious stab wounds. The man was taken to

hospital but died of his injuries, said MacIntosh.

A 29-year-old Hispanic man was arrested at the scene. He was also taken to hospital with minor injuries and was later released. MacIntosh said the suspect and the victim are known to each other.

Homicide investigators believe the incident started as a fight that turned deadly.

THANDI FLETCHER/METRO