

Background

Controversial issues are those topics which are publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of values or belief. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree.

Opportunities to deal with sensitive issues and topics are an integral part of the education programs and schooling process in Alberta schools. Courses of study and education programs must handle controversial issues in a manner that respects the rights and opinions reflected in different perspectives, but that rejects extreme or unethical positions. In all dealings with controversial issues and materials, the Catholic perspective must be included in the presentation and considerations.

For sound judgments to be made, students must have experience in selecting, organizing, and evaluating information. The educational benefits to be gained by studying controversial issues include the development of critical thinking, moral reasoning, and an awareness and understanding of contemporary society.

The Division believes that studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Such study provides opportunities to develop student capacities to think clearly, to reason logically, to think open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view, and to reach sound judgments.

Procedures

1. For sound judgments to be made, information regarding controversial issues is to:
 - 1.1 Represent alternative points of view;
 - 1.2 Appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students;
 - 1.3 Reflect the requirements of the courses as stated in the program of studies;
 - 1.4 Reflect the neighborhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national and international contexts; and
 - 1.5 Reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral/ethical position consistent with Christian lifestyle.
2. The Division expects that all teachers will support parents/guardians in their role as primary educators by presenting, with clarity, the teachings of the Catholic Church when addressing any sensitive issues.

3. In dealing with controversial issues and topics, teachers are expected to consult with parents/guardians, wherever possible, regarding the issues to be covered, the materials to be used and the approach to instruction in the classroom.
4. Teachers will utilize approved resources to support instruction in human sexuality.
5. The Office of the Superintendent will approve all outside presenters as well as printed and digital material on sensitive topics.
6. Parents/Guardians may request, in writing, the exclusion of their child(ren) from formal instruction or activities dealing with a particular controversial issue.
7. Parents/Guardians have the right to formally challenge the use of a particular instructional resource on the grounds of sex, racial, ethnic or cultural stereotyping or offensiveness to community standards.
8. When offering programs that are controversial in nature the principal is responsible for:
 - 8.1 Reviewing program content and materials to ensure conformity to Board policy and administrative procedures;
 - 8.2 Communicating to parents/guardians the nature of the program and responding to parental concerns and informing them of their right to exclude their children from certain program elements;
 - 8.3 Ensuring that staff are adequately in-serviced to provide effective program delivery; and
 - 8.4 Ensuring that alternative learning activities are provided for excluded students.
9. In the event of a parental challenge to the use of a particular learning resource, the principal shall follow the following procedures:
 - 9.1 A meeting will be arranged between the parents/guardians and the teacher with the principal to discuss the nature of the concern.
 - 9.2 If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, the principal will advise the parents/guardians of their right to formally challenge the use of the resource. Such a challenge is to be directed, in writing, to the Superintendent outlining the specific content of the resource that is found objectionable and the specific reasons for the objection.
 - 9.3 The Superintendent will meet with the person challenging the resource and the principal to review the appeal.
 - 9.4 The Superintendent will conduct a hearing at which the challenger and the instructor(s) may present their respective cases.
 - 9.5 The Superintendent will render a decision.



Reference: Section 16, 31, 32, 33, 58, Education Act Alberta Bill of Rights Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom Constitution Act	Approved: 
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Note: References shall be updated as required and do not require additional approval