

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND MATERIALS

Background

Controversial issues are those topics which are publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of values or belief. By their nature, controversial issues generate diverse opinions and debate on the distinctions between right and wrong, justice and injustice, and on the interpretations of fairness and tolerance. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree and may reflect positions quite different than those taken by the Catholic Church.

Students should have classroom experiences that cover a wide range of issues and areas of study. However, it is important that the issues and materials used in all dealings within the school are consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church, standards and values of the Catholic faith and the community. The Division respects the right and responsibility of teachers to use supplementary materials to meet the educational needs of their students. It expects that sound, professional judgment will be exercised and that there will be consultation with others, including parents and other professional colleagues where deemed appropriate.

Alberta Education, in response to representations made regarding the treatment in school programs of such matters as Canadian content, family life education, sexstereotyping and evolution, established provincial policy to deal with controversial issues. Included in their policy guidelines was a recommendation that Divisions establish local procedures regarding the identification and treatment of controversial issues and materials in the classroom.

Procedures

1. Section 58.1 of the *Education Act*, as well as the Guide to Education, provides notice to parents and guidance to administrators and teachers in dealing with issues that may be controversial.
2. Material resources must be connected to appropriate curriculum and programs of study. Information regarding controversial issues should:
 - 2.1 Represent alternate points of view

- 2.2 Reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students.
 - 2.3 Reflect the requirements of the course as stated in the Program of Studies.
 - 2.4 Reflect the neighbourhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national and international contexts.
3. The Board shall provide notice to a parent/ guardian of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.
 4. The Principal is responsible for the following when programs and materials that are controversial are provided in the school:
 - 4.1 Inform the Superintendent or designate regarding the issues to be covered, the materials to be used and the approach to instruction in the classroom;
 - 4.2 Review program content and material to ensure conformity to Board Policies and Administrative Procedures;
 - 4.3 Communicate to parents the nature of the program and hold a parent meeting (if required) to review program content and materials;
 - 4.4 Respond to parental concerns and inform parents of their right to exclude their children from certain program elements;
 - 4.5 Ensure that staff are adequately in-serviced to provide effective program delivery; and
 - 4.6 Ensure that alternative learning activities are provided for excluded students.
 5. Where a teacher or other person providing instruction, teaching a course or program of study or using the instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction, course or program of study or use of instructional materials, the teacher or other person shall, in accordance with the request of the parent, permit the student, without academic penalty.
 - 5.1 To leave the classroom or place where the instruction, course or program of study is taking place or the instructional materials are being used for the duration of the part of the instruction, course or program of study, or the use of the instructional materials.
 - 5.2 To remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction, course or program of study or using the instructional materials.

- 5.3 This does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.
6. Parents may request, in writing to the Principal, the exclusion of their child from formal instruction or activities dealing with a particular controversial issue.
7. Parents have the right to formally challenge the use of a particular instructional resource on the grounds of sexual, racial, ethnical or cultural stereotyping or offensiveness to community standards. The parent shall be referred to Administrative Procedure 210 – Challenge to Learning Resources.

Legal References: **Section 11,18,32,33,41,42,53,58,196,197,222 Education Act**
 Alberta Bill of Rights
 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act, 1982
 Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12