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## CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES EDUCATION

### Background

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 open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view, and to reach sound judgements.

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 within the school are consistent with the standards and values of the Catholic faith and the community.

### Definitions:

#### Discussion

(a) Responding to a discussion

Is when the teacher responds to a question, comment, or the response of a student in the classroom where there may need to be additional information to clarify the perspective. When possible, the teacher must discern when comments and questions are responded to individually, in small groups or in the classroom and whether outside support is needed to address the topic adequately.

(b) Activating a Discussion

Is when the teacher proactively engages students in a discussion about a particular topic outside the curriculum area or a topic that may be politically or polarizing within a local, provincial, national or global community. An “activated” discussion by a teacher about human sexuality and gender identity without providing advance notice to parents is a violation of section 58.1 (1) of the Education Act, which requires a Principal or teacher to provide written notice prior to instruction of the topic.

### Procedures

1. The *Guide to Education*, sections dealing with “Controversial Issues” and “Notice under Section 11.1 of the *Alberta Human Rights Act*” provides guidance to administrators and teachers in dealing with issues that may be controversial.
2. Information regarding controversial issues should:
  - 2.1 Represent alternate points of view; subject to the condition that information presented is not restricted by any federal or provincial law;
  - 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 Principal and/or teacher shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.
4. The Principal and/or teacher shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with human sexuality.
  - 4.1 Notice to a parent/guardian is not required when teachers are responding to a discussion. See definitions.
  - 4.2 For clarity, when teachers activate a discussion, notice to parents/guardians is required.
5. The Principal is responsible for the following when programs and materials are provided in the school that are not in the curriculum, and are controversial:
  - 5.1 Inform the Superintendent or designate regarding the issues to be covered, the materials to be used and the approach to instruction in the classroom;
  - 5.2 Review program content and material to ensure conformity to Board Policies and Administrative Procedures;
  - 5.3 Communicate to parents the nature of the program and hold a parent meeting (if required) to review program content and materials;
  - 5.4 Respond to parental concerns and inform parents of their right to exclude their children from certain program elements;
  - 5.5 Ensure that staff are adequately in-serviced to provide effective program delivery; and
  - 5.6 Ensure that alternative learning activities are provided for excluded students:
    - (a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction is taking place or the for the duration of the part of the instruction
    - (b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction
6. 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.
7. When a teacher or instructor teaching the content regarding human sexuality receives a written request that the student be excluded from the instruction, and is signed by a parent/guardian of a student, the teacher or instructor shall in accordance with the request of the parent permit the student, without academic penalty:
  - (a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction is taking place, for the duration of the part of the instruction
  - (b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction

(c) 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.

8. 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 207 – Challenge to Learning Resources.

Reference: Section 11,18,32,33,41,52,53,58,58.1,58.2,196,197,222 Education Act  
Alberta Bill of Rights  
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, Constitution Act, 1982  
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12