

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Belief

Conflicting values and viewpoints exist in a pluralistic society and occasionally controversies occur. When a controversial issue emerges it must be treated with sensitivity, understanding and fairness. Such treatment should contribute to the development of more open-minded, sensitive, questioning and empathetic attitudes among students.

Guidelines

1. It is an objective of the educational system to develop students' capacities to think clearly, reason logically, examine all issues, and reach sound judgments.
2. Students in classrooms shall not be ridiculed or embarrassed for positions that they hold on a particular issue, this requirement calls for sensitivity on the part of teachers, students and other participants in dealing with such issues.
3. Students should have experiences in selecting and organizing information in order to draw intelligent conclusions from it. For sound judgments to be made, information regarding controversial issues should:
 - 3.1 Be of an informative nature;
 - 3.2 Represent alternative points of view;
 - 3.3 Ensure that teachers guard against expressing their personal opinions as fact;
 - 3.4 Appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students and the program of studies for a course; and
 - 3.5 Reflect the neighborhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national and international contexts.
4. Teachers, administrative staff, students and parents should have a voice in determining:
 - 4.1 The controversial issues to be studied;
 - 4.2 The texts and other materials to be used; and
 - 4.3 The manner in which such issues are dealt with in the classroom
5. Under normal circumstances, the certificated staff will resolve the issues should they arise.
6. Should there be any critical problems, the Superintendent, or his/her designate, may give general directions as to the treatment of the issues in the local classrooms after careful investigation and study.

7. Unless the matter under consideration is of an emergent nature arising within the context of a particular class, students and/or their parents/guardians should be advised ahead of time that a particular issue, which may be sensitive to some, is to be dealt with in the course. Under such circumstances, a student or his/her parent/guardian presenting a reasoned argument for absenting him/herself from discussing that topic shall be allowed to do so.
8. No student shall be allowed to absent him or herself under this administrative procedure from any section of a course approved as 'core' by Alberta Education or the Board.
9. Notification to parents under section 11.1 of the Human Rights Act is required where the instructional materials, exercise, outcome or course contain subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. Principals will provide notice to parents under Section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act by completing Form 206 -1 identifying course outcomes and instructional materials to be used.
10. Pursuant to section 11.1(2) of the Human Rights Act, parents/guardians may request that their child be excluded from the above-identified instruction, without academic penalty. In order for parents to exercise this option they must sign and return Form 206 -2 on or before the date of the instruction indicated in Form 206 – 1.

Reference: Section 39, 60, 61, School Act
Alberta Bill of Rights
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Guide to Education ECS to Grade
Human Rights Act