

# CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES / MATERIALS

## Background

Alberta Education, in response to representations made regarding the treatment in school programs of such matters as Canadian content, family life education, sex-stereotyping 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.

Students are to have classroom experience in selecting and organizing information that facilitates drawing intelligent, rational conclusions.

## 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 course as stated in the Program of Studies.
  - 1.4. Reflect the neighbourhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national and international contexts.
2. In dealing with controversial issues and topics, Principals are expected to consult with parents regarding the issues to be covered, the materials to be used and the approach to instruction in the classroom.
3. Parents may request, in writing, the exclusion of their child(ren) from formal instruction or activities dealing with a particular controversial issue.
4. Parents 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.
5. When offering programs that are controversial in nature the Principal is responsible for:

- 5.1. Reviewing program content and materials to ensure conformity to Board policies and Division administrative procedures;
  - 5.2. Contacting the Director of Faith and Wellness to seek advance approval from Central Learning Services;
  - 5.3. Communicating to parents the nature of the program and holding a parent meeting to review program content and materials, respond to parental concerns and inform parents of their right to exclude their children from certain program elements;
  - 5.4. Ensuring that staff are adequately in-serviced to ensure effective program delivery; and
  - 5.5. Ensuring that alternative learning activities are provided for excluded students.
6. In the event of a parental challenge to the use of a particular learning resource:
- 6.1. A meeting will be arranged between the parent and the teacher with the Principal to discuss the nature of the concern.
  - 6.2. If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, the Principal will advise the parent of their right to formally challenge the use of the resource. Such 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.
  - 6.3. The Superintendent will meet with the person challenging the resource and the Principal to review the appeal.
  - 6.4. The Superintendent will conduct a hearing at which the challenger and the instructors may present their respective cases.
  - 6.5. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved by the Superintendent's decision, the matter may be appealed to the Board.

Reference: *Education Act*, SA 2012, c E-0.3, ss. 11, 18, 32, 33, 41, 52, 53, 58, 58.1, 58.2, 196, 197, 222  
Alberta Bill of Rights  
Alberta Human Rights Act  
Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act  
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act, 1982  
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12