

## **CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

### **Background**

In an ever changing world for which the Division is trying to provide its students with meaningful educational experiences, controversial issues may from time to time be introduced into the classroom, particularly at the junior and senior high school levels. It is an objective of the Division to develop students' capacities to think clearly, reason logically, examine all issues and reach sound judgments. The following procedures are to govern the discussion of controversial issues.

### **Procedures**

1. Students in classrooms shall not be ridiculed or embarrassed for positions which they hold on a particular controversial issue, a requirement which calls for sensitivity on the part of teachers, students and other participants in dealing with such issues.
2. Students are to 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 is to:
  - 2.1 Be of an informative nature;
  - 2.2 Represent alternative points of view;
  - 2.3 Ensure that teachers guard against expressing their personal opinions as fact;
  - 2.4 Appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students and the program of studies for a course;
  - 2.5 Reflect the neighbourhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national, and international contexts.
3. Teachers, administrative staff, students and parents are to have a voice in determining:
  - 3.1 The controversial issues to be studied;
  - 3.2 The tests and other materials to be used;
  - 3.3 The manner in which such issues are dealt with in the classroom.
4. Under normal circumstances, the professional staff will resolve the issues should they arise.
5. Should there be any critical problems, the Superintendent or designate may give general directions as to the treatment of the issues in the local classrooms after careful investigation and study.
6. Unless the matter under discussion is of an emergent nature arising within the context of a particular class, students and/or their parents/guardians are to 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 their parent/guardian presenting a reasoned argument for absenting themselves from discussing that topic shall be allowed to do so.

- 6.1 As per section 58.1 of the Education Act, notification to parents/guardians is required where the instructional materials, exercises, outcomes, or courses contain subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.
  - 6.1.1 The Principal shall post a notice regarding section 50.1 on the school website.
  - 6.1.2 Parents/guardians shall be advised of the controversial content in specific classes in advance, using section 50.1 Notice and Student Exemption Form (Form 205-1 pt. 1).
  - 6.1.3 This letter shall advise parents/guardians of their right to exempt their child.
  - 6.1.4 Parents/guardians may exempt their child by informing the Principal, in writing using the section 50.1 Notice and Student Exemption Form (Form 205-1 pt. 2).
  - 6.1.5 Teachers shall, in accordance with a parent/guardian request, permit the student to:
    - 6.1.5.1 Leave the classroom to an alternative work environment, or
    - 6.1.5.2 Remain in the classroom without taking part.
  - 6.1.6 Exempted students shall not receive an academic penalty.
  - 6.1.7 Teachers shall provide a meaningful alternative activity.
7. No student shall be allowed to absent themselves under this Administrative Procedure from any section of a course approved as "core" by Alberta Education or the Division.

Adopted/Revised: JUN 2016/NOV 2019

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