

## Administrative Procedure 205 - Controversial Issues

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### Background

The Division recognizes that, in an ever changing world for which it is trying to provide its students with meaningful educational experiences, controversial issues may from time to time be introduced into the classroom. Controversial issues are those topics which are publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of opinion, values or belief. By their nature, they generate diverse opinions and debate on the distinctions between right and wrong, justice and injustice, and on interpretations of fairness and tolerance. They include topics on which reasonable people may genuinely disagree. The following procedures shall govern the discussion of such issues in schools.

### Definitions

#### **Controversial Issues:**

are those topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree - such as religion and human sexuality.

#### **Controversial Resources:**

are those resources used in the classroom or available in the learning commons/library that may be sensitive to certain individuals based on their values and beliefs.

### Procedures

1. Consider students' opinion shall be respected for positions which they hold on a particular 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 conclusions. For sound judgments to be made, information regarding controversial issues are 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 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 texts and other materials to be used
    - 3.3. the manner in which such issues are dealt with in the school
  4. As per Section 58.1 of the Education Act, notification to parents/guardians is required where the instructional materials, exercises, outcome or courses contain subject matter that deal primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.
    - 4.1. The Principal shall post a notice regarding Section 58.1 on the school website.
    - 4.2. Parents shall be advised of the controversial content in specific classes in advance by a letter. The letter shall advise that parents/guardians of their right to exempt their child.
    - 4.3. Teachers shall, in accordance with parent/guardian request, permit the student to:
      - 4.3.1. Leave the classroom to an alternative work environment; or
      - 4.3.2. Remain in the classroom without taking part.
  5. Teachers, students and others participating in studies or discussions of controversial issues shall exercise sensitivity to ensure each individual is treated with respect and feels comfortable voicing their position on controversial issues. Teachers shall guard against expressing their personal opinions as facts.
  6. Should there be any problems which cannot be resolved at the school level, the Superintendent shall provide general directions as to the treatment of the issues in the local school(s).
  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.
  8. Where a student is permitted to withdraw because of parental discretion or because of personal belief, such withdrawal shall not adversely affect any mark or grade they receive for the course.
  9. Students who are absent from certain programs or from certain parts of a course are expected to remain in school, and will undertake other appropriate tasks assigned by the teacher during that period.
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References: 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 Charter of Rights and Freedoms  
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12

Effective: 1998-06-11

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