

## Policy 19 - Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Environments

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The Board is committed to ensuring that each Division student and each staff member employed by the Division is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self. The Board values all members of our educational community where everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We value and respect diversity, and strive to treat others with kindness, caring and tolerance. Students, staff and visitors are expected to model and to reinforce these beliefs and values. Our decisions and actions shall be governed by the following beliefs/principles which will be reflected in Division and school programs, operations and practices.

- A welcoming, caring, respectful and safe school environment is foundational for students to learn and to achieve high academic standards.
- Each student and staff member has the right to learn and work in schools / departments that promote equality of opportunity, dignity and respect.
- Equity of opportunity, and equity of access to programs, services, and resources are critical to supporting all students in realizing their full potential.
- School and Division staff will be respectful of the concerns of students and their families, and will work with them to provide appropriate support and resolve their issues in a timely manner. School staffs have the responsibility to ensure that students and their families feel safe to share issues and concerns.
- The Board values and embraces diversity while adhering to inclusionary practices which promote a sense of belonging and respect learners' differing needs, cultures, backgrounds and abilities.
- The Board affirms the rights of, and will not tolerate discrimination against students, staff or any person because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or class of persons or of any other person or class of persons.
- The Board is committed to ensure all children and students have access to meaningful learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports, regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation or any other factor.
- The Board supports students who wish to establish a student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote positive learning environments in accordance with Section 35.1 of the *Education Act*:
  - If one or more students attending a school operated by a Board request a staff member employed by the Board for support to establish a voluntary student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring,

- respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, the Principal of the school shall
- immediately grant permission for the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and
  - within a reasonable time from the date that the Principal receives the request designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization or to assist in organizing the activity.
- The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization or activity, including the name “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”, after consulting with the Principal.
    - For greater certainty, the Principal shall not prohibit or discourage students from choosing a name that includes “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”.
  - The Principal shall immediately inform the Board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison, and if so informed, the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization at the school.
  - The Principal is responsible for ensuring that notification, if any, respecting a voluntary student organization or an activity is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity, and
    - is otherwise consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other student organizations and activities.
    - As a public body, the Division is governed and bound by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* which governs the disclosure of personal information by the School Authority.
  - The Board will not tolerate threatening, harassing, intimidating, assaulting or bullying by any person within the school community including aggressive behaviours such as “cyber” hate messaging where the behaviour has a negative impact on the individual in a school environment.
  - The Board encourages reporting to a responsible adult of all incidents of threats, bullying, harassment, violence or intimidation regardless of the identity of the alleged harasser or offender. Any breaches outlined under this policy must be reported immediately in accordance with *Board Policy 23 - Public Interest Disclosure* and *Administrative Procedure 403 - Duty to Report*.
  - The Board acknowledges its responsibility to support and assist any employee, volunteer, person providing goods or services, or student who is subjected to harassment or violence within its schools or workplaces. The Board expects allegations of bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence to be investigated in a timely and respectful manner.

- All members of the school community including trustees, employees, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and visitors are expected to model respectful conduct and behavior and share the responsibility for eliminating bullying, discrimination, harassment and violence.
- The Board expects students to adhere to the Division Code of Conduct and schools' codes of conduct.
- The Board expects all trustees, employees, students, parents, volunteers, visitors and contractors to support this policy.
- This policy covers behaviour not only at Division schools and offices, but also at any Board or school-related function including field trips, conferences, training sessions, work done off site, and social functions. This policy applies whether the contact is face-to-face, by phone, fax, e-mail, Internet or Intranet, or by any other means of communication.
- The Board recognizes the third week in November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

### **Definitions:**

*Bullying* means repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual's reputation.

*Discrimination* means treating a person negatively or disrespectfully, or refusing, without lawful excuse, to provide an opportunity or benefit with respect to access to learning or access to any term or condition of employment because of any of the protected categories in The Alberta Human Rights Act. The behaviour giving rise to a complaint of discrimination need not be intentional in order to be considered discrimination. With respect to student placement decisions, the above does not apply to a refusal, limitation, specification, or preference based on a bona fide educational requirement. With respect to employment, the above does not apply to a refusal, limitation, specification, or preference based on a bona fide occupational requirement.

The protected categories in The Alberta Human Rights Act:

*Age* – Age is defined as “eighteen (18) years or older”. Persons under the age of eighteen (18) can make complaints on all grounds except the ground of age.

*Ancestry* – belonging to a group of people related by a common heritage.

*Colour* – colour of a person's skin.

*Family status* – being related to another person by blood, marriage, or adoption.

*Gender* – being male, female, or transgender.

*Marital status* – the status of being married, single, widowed, divorced, or separated or living with another person in a conjugal relationship outside marriage

*Mental disability* – any mental disorder, developmental disorder, or learning disorder, regardless of the cause or duration of the disorder.

*Physical disability* – any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness.

*Place of origin* – place of birth.

*Race* – belonging to a group of people related by a common heritage.

*Religious beliefs* – system of beliefs, worship and conduct, including native spirituality.

*Sexual Orientation* – a person's actual or presumed sexual orientation, whether homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual.

*Source of Income* – any income that attracts a social stigma to its recipients, for example, social assistance and disability pension.

*Gender expression* refers to the varied ways in which a person expresses their gender, which can include a combination of dress, grooming, demeanour, social behaviour and other factors.

*Gender identity* refers to a person's internal, individual experience of gender, which may not coincide with the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation, which is also protected under the Alberta Human Rights Act.

*Harassment* is repeated unwelcome verbal or physical conduct, including harassment that relates to discrimination. Usually, it must be repeated to constitute harassment but single acts can be harassing if they are severe, or involve obvious power imbalance. Harassment is insulting, demeaning or intimidating. Examples of harassment include but are not limited to the following: verbal or physical abuse; threats; derogatory remarks; jokes; innuendo or taunts about appearance or beliefs; display or electronic transfer of pornographic, racist or offensive images; and condescension that undermines self-confidence or is an unreasonable invasion of one's person. Harassment can be bullying or outright physical assault. The behaviour giving rise to a complaint need not be intentional in order to be considered harassment; it is sufficient that the offender knows, or ought reasonably to know, that the behaviour is offensive and unwelcome.

*Intimidation* is intentional behavior that would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities fear of injury or harm.

*Respect* means to show consideration for others.

*Sexual harassment* is any unwelcome behaviour that is sexual in nature. Unwanted sexual advances, unwanted requests for sexual acts, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- the harasser knows or ought to know that it is unwelcome; or
- such conduct undermines another individual's personal dignity by causing embarrassment, discomfort, humiliation or offence; or
- such conduct interferes with an individual's work performance or learning opportunities by creating an intimidating or hostile work or learning environment; or

- submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or of educational services; or
- submission to or rejection of such conduct affects decisions regarding that individual's employment or educational advancement including matters such as promotion, salary, benefits, job security, grades, or employment references.

Sexual harassment includes such things as unwanted touching (e.g. pinching, patting, rubbing), leering, sexist or dirty jokes, the display of sexually suggestive material, derogatory or degrading comments, sexually suggestive gestures, and unwelcome propositions, innuendos, demands or inquiries of a sexual nature.

*Workplace violence* is the threatened, attempted, or actual conduct of a person that causes or is likely to cause physical injury. Examples include, but are not limited to the following:

- threatening behaviour such as shaking fists, destroying property, or throwing objects;
- verbal or written threats that express an intent to inflict harm;
- physical attacks; or
- any other act that would arouse fear in a reasonable person in the circumstances.
- respondent is the individual the complainant alleges has engaged in prohibited behaviour. This would include discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, or violence.

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Reference: Section 8, 31, 33, 35, 35.1, 36, 37, 41, 51, 52, 53, 222 Education Act  
Alberta Human Rights Act  
Teaching Profession Act  
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms  
Criminal Code

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