

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND RESOURCES

Background:

The Division recognizes studying controversial issues is an integral part of student learning and is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. The study of controversial issues provides students with opportunities to develop the ability to think clearly, to reason logically, to open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view, and to make sound judgments. The Division respects the rights of parents and students to request to be exempt from such instruction without judgment.

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. Information regarding controversial issues must:
 - 1.1. be of an informative nature;
 - 1.2. represent alternative points of view;
 - 1.3. appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students;
 - 1.4. effectively meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses of study and educational programs; and
 - 1.5. reflect local as well as provincial, national and international contexts.
2. 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 fact.
3. 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:
 - 3.1. The Principal shall post a [notice](#) regarding Section 58.1 on the school website.
 - 3.2. Parents/guardians shall be advised of the controversial content in specific classes in advance, using a [parent notification letter](#). The letter shall advise parents/guardians of their right to exempt their child.

- 3.3. Parents/guardians may exempt their child by informing the Principal in writing using the [Student Exemption/Informed Consent Form](#) (Form 205-3).
- 3.4. Teachers shall, in accordance with parent/guardian request, permit the student to:
 - 3.4.1. leave the classroom to an alternative work environment; or
 - 3.4.2. remain in the classroom without taking part.
- 3.5. Exempted students shall not receive an academic penalty.
- 3.6. Teachers shall provide a meaningful alternative activity.
4. Notification to parents/guardians is not required for incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in an outcome, course, exercise or instructional material.
5. Notification to parents/guardians is required for a school that offers a religious-based alternative program—Strathcona Christian Academy Elementary, Strathcona Christian Academy Secondary, Fort Saskatchewan Christian, LOGOS and colony schools. Notification may be satisfied by providing a clear statement on registration forms indicating to parents/guardians they are enrolling their child in a school or program where religious instruction, exercises or instructional materials are used and that religion permeates the school or program.
6. Principals shall ensure religious books, such as the *Gideon Bible*, are not distributed to students unless enrolled in a religious-based alternative program—Strathcona Christian Academy Elementary, Strathcona Christian Academy Secondary, Fort Saskatchewan Christian, LOGOS or colony schools.
7. In the event an employee, student or parent/guardian expresses concerns regarding controversial issues or resources:
 - 7.1. The Principal shall arrange a meeting with the individual(s) bringing forth the challenge, the Principal, and the teacher or teacher-librarian to discuss the nature of the concern.
 - 7.2. If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, the Principal shall advise the individual(s) bringing forth the concerns of their right to take their concerns forward to the Superintendent or designate, who may assign this to a review committee and arrange meetings as required.
 - 7.3. The Superintendent or designate shall render a decision and communicate this, in writing, to the individual(s) involved.
8. As per [Board Policy 13: Appeals and Hearings Regarding Student Matters](#), parents/guardians may further appeal the decision of the Superintendent to the Board.

Reference:

Section 1, 2, 16, 18, 43, 52, 53, 58.1, 196, 197, 222 *Education Act*
Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12