

## **CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND HUMAN SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

### **Background**

Controversial issues are those topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there may not be a consensus of values or beliefs. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree. Opportunities to deal with these issues are an integral part of education in Alberta. (Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders Companion Document, Alberta Education).

Growth, development, and human sexuality are concepts outlined in the Grade 4-6 Physical Education and Wellness curriculum, Grade 7-9 Health program of studies as well as CALM 20, as such teachers are legally and professionally obligated to provide instruction of these outcomes.

For the course of study, educational program or instructional material, or instruction or exercise, to be considered to deal explicitly with religion or human sexuality, there must be no question that the subject matter is intended to be about religion or human sexuality. A religious interpretation of an otherwise non-religious subject matter would not be considered explicit. For example, the intent of including evolution in the science programs of study is to explore its foundation in scientific theory. Although there may be religious interpretations of the origin of life, the inclusion of evolution is not intended to be explicitly about religion. Similarly, in order to be considered explicitly about “human sexuality”, a course of study, educational program or instructional material, or instruction or exercise, must also address human sexual behaviours. Therefore, outcomes within the science programs of study that deal only with the anatomy and physiology of human reproduction are not explicitly about human sexuality; however, outcomes in CALM that examine aspects of healthy sexuality and responsible sexual behaviour are explicitly about human sexuality.

The Education Act in Alberta provides that schools will provide notice to parents when:

- 58.1(1) A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.
- (2) Where a teacher or other person providing instruction, teaching a course or program of study or using the instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction, course or program of study or use of instructional materials, the teacher or other person shall, in accordance with the request of the parent, permit the student, without academic penalty,
- (a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction, course or program of study is taking place or the instructional materials are being used for the duration of the part of the instruction, course or program of study, or the use of the instructional materials, that includes the subject-matter referred to in subsection (1), or

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(b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction, course or program of study or using the instructional materials.

- (3) This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction, or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.

The Assistant Superintendent, Learning Services and principals are responsible for the administration of this administrative procedure.

### Procedures

1. Each Principal, in consultation with the staff and School Council, is to establish procedures for dealing with controversial issues. Procedures must adhere to Alberta Education requirements as outlined in the *Guide to Education / Controversial Issues*.
2. Teachers can discuss controversial issues in the classroom. School procedures shall:
  - Represent alternative points of view, subject to the condition that information presented is not restricted by any federal or provincial law
  - Reflect the maturity, capabilities, and educational needs of the students
  - Meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses and programs of study and education programs
  - Be sensitive to the community in which the school is located, as well as
  - Reflect the provincial, national and international contexts
3. Teachers, students and others participating in studies or discussions of controversial issues shall exercise sensitivity so that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed or intimidated for positions they hold on controversial issues.
4. Principals shall advise the Superintendent when an issue becomes controversial in a school.
5. Schools play a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development and school staff shall handle parental decisions in regard to controversial issues with respect and sensitivity.
6. Notification to parents under section 58.1:
  - 6.1 Form [205-2](#) (Notice to Parents, duly completed by the school) will be sent home with the student in a sealed envelope, and also sent by email as an attachment.
  - 6.2 Form 205-2 will be sent and communicated home a minimum of two weeks prior to the instruction.
  - 6.3 Allow a minimum of two weeks prior for parents/guardian, should they wish, to review materials to be used in the teaching of human sexuality content prior to the commencement of such instruction.
7. Exemption from instruction under section 58.1:
  - 7.1 Parents/guardians will complete Form 205-1 and return to the school within 1 week of receipt of Form 205-2 to indicate their child's exemption from instruction.
  - 7.2 Students receiving exemption from instruction will receive alternate learning opportunities.
  - 7.3 Parents/guardians declining permission for their child to participate in human sexuality learning will adhere to the following guidelines:
    - 7.3.1 The teaching of human sexuality content requires that parents request, in

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writing, that their child not participate in the content if they so wish. Suitable alternative learning experiences will be provided to students in these cases.

7.3.2 CALM 20 (Career and Life Management) is compulsory for graduation either on a three or five (3 or 5) credit basis.

7.3.3 2.2.1 Only students whose parents have requested, in writing, that their child not participate in this specific content area of the curriculum will be excused. These students will be given alternative activities related to other aspects of the Grade 4 to 6 Physical Education and Wellness, Grade 7 to 9 Health, or CALM 20 Program.

[Form 205-1 – Student Exemption](#)

[Form 205-2 – Notice to Parent](#)