



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

January - February 2024

Briefing Note for:

MLA for Highwood, RJ Sigurdson, Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation

MLA for Livingstone-Macleod, Chelsae Petrovic

MLA for Banff-Kananaskis, Sara Elmeligi

Purpose

To provide concise, reliable, and accurate information to assist the Honorable Minister and Foothills School Division MLAs in their advocacy for their constituents and for the Foothills School Division.

Subject: *Mandatory Holocaust education for Alberta students*

Summary

In November 2023 the Alberta government announced that studying the Holocaust will be a compulsory part of the province's new social studies curriculum. While making the announcement, Minister Nicolaides shared that Alberta Education would begin the process of engaging with education partners, curriculum specialists and teachers on the development of new K-12 social studies curriculum.

Quick Facts

At the Regular Board Meeting of September 2, 2020, the Board of Trustees approved the use of Locally Developed Course *Holocaust Studies 15, 25, 35* – a course developed by Foothills School Division, led by teacher Lindsay Anderson.

- In a letter to Foothills School Division, the Honourable Minister of Education both recognized and commended FSD on our efforts to “provide students with the opportunity to learn more about the Holocaust and how it affects the world in current times.”

Considerations

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaides’s letter (attached) to Foothills School Division.





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Subject: *Parental right and responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children.*

Summary

Foothills School Division recognizes that all education partners share responsibility for student growth and achievement. Parents are one of these partners and currently have their rights and responsibilities protected in the existing framework of the [Education Act](#).

Specifically, parents have the “right to choose the kind of education that shall be provided” to their child and the responsibility to “act as the primary decision-maker with respect to their child’s education”. Additionally, parents have the right to exclude their child from religious instruction, patriotic instruction, and from programs of studies where the subject-matter deals primarily and explicitly with human sexuality. In fact, Section 58.1 requires school authorities to provide **Notice to Parents** 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”.

Balancing an individual’s parental rights and responsibility, Foothills School Division also has the responsibility to “deliver appropriate education programming to meet the needs of all students enrolled in a school operated by the board and to enable their success” and to “ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging”.

Quick Facts

- Foothills School Division recently undertook an extensive consultation to ensure our *welcoming, safe, caring, inclusive and respectful learning environments* policy was meeting the needs of everyone across the division. This consultation began in September 2022 and included the voice of all shareholders including students, staff, employee groups, families, and parents.
- In March 2023, after being open for a further 8 weeks of consultation, the Board accepted final reading of [Policy 14 - A Place for All](#).
- Following guidance from Alberta Education’s Guide to Education / Controversial Issues, FSD’s [Administrative Procedure 205 – Controversial Issues and Human Sexuality](#) provides further assurances to parents that they are informed about what their child is learning.

Considerations

[Education Act](#)

[Guide to Education – Considerations for program delivery and school operations - Controversial Issues](#)





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Issue: *Concerns as to how the Provincial Bargaining Coordinating Office's (PBCO) mandate is structured and the position it puts school boards in as we bargain with our various unions.*

Summary

The Foothills School Division has long been a proponent of Provincial strategies on bargaining and the sharing of information between boards and between boards and government. Our concerns are twofold and come from how the Provincial Bargaining Coordinating Office's (PBCO) mandate is structured – specifically the restrictive position it puts boards in when bargaining with our various unions.

Our first concern is the strict mandate from which FSD must negotiate new agreements with our unions without the flexibility of being able to meet local needs or sharing our inability to vary from the mandate. The second, more pressing concern is that boards, such as FSD, who have unions, are required to strictly adhere to PBCO mandates while those boards without unions are under no such obligations and can give raises or increase compensation.

Quick Facts

- Foothills School Division does not have the ability to effectively attract and retain necessary Educational Assistants to meet our local needs.
- We have had over 20 resignations from our para-professional group since January of 2022 and we are struggling to attract new employees for Educational Assistant positions within the current labour environment.
- Mandate letter includes the need to explore short- and long-term solutions that will address the shortage of educational assistants in classrooms to help address learning loss and the increasing complexity of learning needs.
- Changes to the Transportation regulation will be a province-wide bus driver shortage leading to increased competition for employees. Given the current PBCO mandate, Foothills School Division will be unable to offer competitive wages if provincially, driver's wages increase.

Considerations

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaidis's [Mandate Letter](#) initiative directing the Minister to "[explore] incentives to support the recruitment and retention of teachers, educational assistants and support staff in underserved areas of the province."

Yours in Education,

Theresa Letendre, Board Chair | Ward 3

Lisa Penzo, Vice Chair | Ward 4

Jack Molyneux | Ward 1

John Evans | Ward 2

Sharon Nichols | Ward 4

Phil Irwin | Ward 5