

206 TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Background

The Division recognizes that 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. Intellectual inquiry requires material representing the widest range of interests so that students may freely explore their world. The Division, therefore, accepts the Alberta Education Policy for the Division, which is:

In principle, it is an objective of the Alberta education system to develop students' capacities to think clearly, reason logically, examine all issues and reach sound judgments.

Definition

A controversial issue

A topic which is publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. As a result, diverse opinions, distinct differences and varying interpretations may result in sincere disagreement.

Procedures

The procedures, based on this principle, are:

1. Each principal 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. Students in Alberta classrooms should not be ridiculed or embarrassed for positions which they hold on any issue, a requirement which calls for sensitivity on the part of teachers, students and other participants in dealing with such issues.
3. Students should have experience in selecting and organizing information in order to draw intelligent conclusions from it. For sound judgments to be made, information regarding controversial issues should:
 - a. represent alternative points of view;

- b. appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students and reflect the requirements of the course as stated in the program of studies;
- c. reflect the neighborhood and community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincial, national and international contexts.

4. Religion

- a. The Alberta Human Rights Act provides that boards have a *Duty to Accommodate* based upon religious beliefs (which includes indigenous spirituality).
- b. Where a parent or student makes a written request, the principal may exempt the student, without academic penalty, from such instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional material.

References

Section 11,18,32,33,41,42,52,53,58,58.1,58.2,196,197,222 Education Act
Alberta Bill of Rights
Alberta Human Rights Act
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12

History

Developed: August 2003
Amended: July 2014
Amended: January 2020