

## WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS

### Background:

The Division is committed to ensuring all members of the school community are provided with welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and foster a sense of belonging. All individuals within the Division have the right to learn in settings that promote equality of opportunity, dignity and respect regardless of race, age, ancestry, place of origin, colour, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical or mental disability, marital status, family status, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation.

All students and staff have a right to an environment free from discrimination, threats and personal harassment including sexually harassing behaviours. This includes ensuring we create safe, caring environments for all irrespective of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity. This responsibility is expressed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Education Act*.

Incidents of harassment, bullying or discrimination related to actual or perceived diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions of any member of the school community are taken seriously. The Division is also committed to the investigation of these reported incidents in a timely manner and taking necessary action(s) or remedies as a result of an investigation.

### Definitions:

#### Bullying:

means hostile or demeaning behaviour that is intended to cause harm, fear, distress or humiliation, and includes psychological harm or harm to an individual's reputation.

#### Conflict in Relationship:

occurs through episodic acts of breakdowns in relationship between students. Conflict is an inevitable component of students learning to grow within social relationships. Disagreement and misunderstanding between parties is at the heart of conflict. However, conflict does not constitute premeditated efforts to cause harm, fear or distress. Parameters for addressing conflict between students may be dealt with through counselling and/or [Administrative Procedure 350: Student Conduct](#).

#### Harassment:

means any unwelcome behaviour, conduct or communication directed intentionally or unintentionally at an individual that is offensive to that individual and includes, but is not limited to, breach of the rights identified in the Alberta Human Rights Act. Personal harassing behaviour may include, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying,

threats, intimidation, ostracism, offensive gestures, offensive remarks or jokes, demeaning or humiliating actions or behaviour that supports a hostile or poisonous environment. Harassment does not include the appropriate exercise of supervisory authority.

**Restorative Practice:**

promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches among students, families and school staff. The approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed or harmed. The approaches allow schools to act and respond in ways that are healing, rather than alienating or coercive. Restorative discipline is a strategy a principal may use to address bullying within a school.

**Supporting Positive Behaviours:**

is a strategy for schools to further the social responsibility and responsiveness of students in meeting behavioural expectations in a school. Within the model, pre-determined levels of support and intervention are established to enhance a positive climate of school engagement for all students. While the support model may look different at each school, three levels may be clearly identified:

- **Basic/Universal Support:** Systematic teaching that produces a clear understanding of expectations is developed in a collaborative and respectful culture.
- **Targeted Support:** Additional support is provided for students who have not yet internalized appropriate responses to the expectations they have been expected to follow.
- **Individual/Intensive Support:** Highly focused support is established for students who require ongoing adult monitoring in order to engage in appropriate behaviours.

Supporting Positive Behaviours is based on a belief that teaching and nourishing appropriate behaviours has a far greater success than relying on a model of consequences and punishment. The model is applied according to the age and stage of development of the learner, and is a strategy a principal may also use to address bullying within a school.

**Procedures:**

1. All members of the school community are expected to play a positive role to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying behaviours.
2. Students and parents are encouraged to report bullying behaviour to school staff.
3. All reports of bullying or harassment shall be taken seriously and investigated by school staff.
4. If, in the opinion of the teacher or Principal, an act of bullying has occurred, interventions shall be applied dedicated to stopping the behaviour in the future and educating the student who is targeted about how to address the issue in the future. Interventions shall be applied to both those who are targets of bullying behaviour and those who engage in bullying behaviour in order to further a safe and caring culture within the school.

5. Parents play a primary role in assisting with the resolution of matters pertaining to bullying. Apprising them of issues in this area as they have impacted their children should occur at the earliest opportunity.
6. A Principal may use a Restorative Discipline or Positive Behavioural Support model to address matters of discipline.
7. Incidences of bullying that adversely impact the safety of individuals or are an affront to the common good of the school community may be addressed through application of sections 36 or 37 of the *Education Act* (Suspension and Expulsion) or [Administrative Procedure 355: Suspension or Expulsion of Students](#).
8. The Division shall establish consistent school-based practices to ensure sexual minority members of school communities and their families are welcomed, accepted and included in all aspects of education and school life. Further, the Division shall make equitable access to resources and support services for sexual minority students and staff.
9. The Division shall provide and promote opportunities for staff to increase their awareness and understanding of the scope and impact of discrimination against sexual minority people, including professional learning opportunities, so staff are informed and familiar with expectations pertaining to human rights, discrimination, harassment, sexual and gender minority diversity, and become aware of and sensitive to the needs and concerns of sexual and gender minority students and their families.
10. The Division shall commit to ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with sexual minority communities to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and community.
11. Teachers are encouraged to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to understand the unique perspectives and lived realities of sexual and gender minorities. Teachers shall use language and educational resources and approaches that are inclusive, age appropriate and respectful of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.
12. Staff will have access to information about available community resources and expertise. When needed, staff may help a student (or student's family) identify and access relevant and appropriate resources beyond the school. The Division shall ensure staff will not refer students to programs or services that attempt to change or repair a student's sexual orientation or gender identity.
13. Learning, curriculum and library resources shall reflect and value the diversity in the Division, so all students see themselves and their lives positively reflected.
14. Principals shall identify a staff person(s) annually to be a safe contact for students who identify themselves as sexual minorities. Principals shall inform students and staff about the location and availability of this contact person.
15. Principals shall support the establishment and naming of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), Queer-Straight Alliances (QSAs) or other similar clubs as specified in the *Education Act*.
  - 15.1. 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

- 15.1.1. permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and
  - 15.1.2. subject to section 15.3, 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.
- 15.2. 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.
- 15.3. The Principal shall immediately inform the board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison referred to in section 15.1.2, 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.
- 15.4. The Principal is responsible for ensuring that notification, if any, respecting a voluntary student organization or an activity referred to in section 15 is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity.
  - 15.4.1. Notification, if any, is otherwise consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other student organizations or activities.
- 15.5. The privacy of students who join a GSA or QSA is protected and the Principal shall ensure all staff recognize the confidentiality of the sexual orientation and gender identity of all students and protect them from unwanted disclosure of this information in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.
16. The Division shall ensure staff address and provide appropriate remedial consequences for interactions involving the use of comments, behaviours and actions that are homophobic, transphobic and sexist, whether they occur in person or in digital form.
17. The Division shall use respectful and inclusive language in its communication to students, staff, families and the community. The unique identities of sexual minority students, families, cultures and communities are valued by schools’ use of non-gendered language in regular communication tools (websites, newsletters, social media sites, etc.) and the open identification of an inclusive environment for all.
18. The Division shall maintain the right of sexual minority students and staff to privacy and confidentiality regarding their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression and protect them from unwanted disclosure of such information. This includes all student and employee records, forms and processes.
19. Students’ right of self-identification is the sole measure of their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression. Transgender students shall have the right to be addressed by their preferred name(s) and pronoun(s) that correspond to their lived gender identities. Students shall be informed of limitations regarding their chosen name and gender identity or gender expression in relation to official school records that require legal name designation.
20. Principals shall ensure dress codes are flexible, inclusive and respectful of the gender identities and gender expressions of all members of the school community.

21. The Division shall make gender neutral washrooms and change rooms available to students and staff. Students are to be able to access washrooms and change rooms that are congruent with their lived gender identity and the Division shall make reasonable efforts to provide solutions that are respectful, discreet and safe for all students.
22. All students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, shall be able to participate in physical education classes and extracurricular activities in ways that are safe, comfortable and consistent with their lived gender identity.
23. The Division shall work with all schools, communities and educational stakeholders to ensure this Administrative Procedure is respectfully implemented to support all students, staff and families in Division schools.
24. The Division recognizes that change occurs over time and as understandings of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions evolve, procedures and practices to support welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning and working environments shall develop correspondingly.

**Reference:**

Section 11, 21, 31, 32, 33, 35.1, 52, 53, 56, 58.1, 58.2, 68, 196, 197, 204, 222, 225 *Education Act*  
Alberta Bill of Rights  
*Alberta Human Rights Act*  
Ministerial Order 028/2020 - Student Learning  
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12  
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms  
Truth and Reconciliation Final Report  
Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions