



---

## Background

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. Such study provides students 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.

### **Notice under s.58.1 of the Education Act**

Section 58.1 of the Education Act requires boards to provide parents with notice where “courses of study, education programs or instructional materials or instruction or exercises...include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality.” Where a parent makes a written request, teachers shall exempt the student, without academic penalty, from such instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional materials (see Appendix A). These requirements do not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality.

The School Authority 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 (e.g. religion and human sexuality).

***Controversial Resources*** are those resources used in the classroom or available in the library that may be sensitive to certain individuals based on their values and beliefs.

---

## Procedures

1. Teachers shall discuss potentially controversial issues with the principal prior to presenting the issue to students and, where deemed appropriate, give notification to parents.
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 not express their personal opinions as fact.
3. Information regarding controversial issues must:
  - 3.1. Be of an informative nature; represent alternative points of view, provided federal or provincial law does not restrict the information presented.
  - 3.2. Reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students.
  - 3.3. Effectively meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses of study and educational programs;
  - 3.4. Reflect the neighbourhood and community, as well as provincial, national and international contexts.
  - 3.5. Use carefully reviewed resources.
4. As per Section 58.1(1) of the Education Act, notification to parents/guardians is required where the instructional materials, exercises, outcomes, or course contain subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality:
  - 4.1. The principal shall post a notice regarding Section 58.1(1) on the school website.
  - 4.2. Parents/guardians shall be advised of the controversial content in specific classes in advance, using the Parent Notification letter (*Form AF205-1 Notice Form to Parents*). This letter shall advise parents/guardians of their right to exempt their child.
  - 4.3. Parents/guardians may exempt their child by informing the principal in writing using the student exemption notice form to the school, which will be sent home attached to the Parent Notification letter.
  - 4.4. Teachers shall, in accordance with parent/guardian request, permit the student to:
    - 4.4.1. Leave the classroom to an alternative work environment; or
    - 4.4.2. Remain in the classroom without taking part.
  - 4.5. Exempted students shall not receive an academic penalty.
  - 4.6. Teachers shall provide a meaningful alternative activity.
5. 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.

6. In the event that an individual(s) expresses concerns regarding controversial issues or resources:
    - 6.1. The teacher shall arrange a meeting with the individual(s) bringing forth the challenge, to discuss the nature of the concern.
    - 6.2. If the complainant feels further action is warranted, form 205A (Request for Reconsideration of Material/Programming) form is to be completed and submitted to school administration by the complainant. A copy of the form can be obtained by contacting the teacher.
    - 6.3. The principal will review the submitted document and, within a reasonable timeframe, consider if further discussion or action is needed. If needed, the principal will enter into additional discussion with the complainant.
    - 6.4. If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, the principal shall notify the superintendent of the concern and the actions undertaken. The superintendent will, in consultation with the principal and/or the complainant, work to resolve the concern.
    - 6.5. If the issue cannot be resolved, the superintendent shall advise the individual(s) bringing forth their concerns of their right to take their concerns forward to the board of directors, who may assign this to a review committee and/or arrange meetings as required.
    - 6.6. The board shall render a decision and communicate this, in writing, to the individual(s) involved.
  7. As per *Board Policy 13 - Appeals and Hearings Regarding Student Matters*, parents/guardians may further appeal the decision to the Charter Board.
- 

*Reference:* Education Act 16, 18, 27, 52, 58, 196, 197, 222  
Alberta Bill of Rights  
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom,  
Constitution Act, 1982  
Guide to Education Alberta ECS to Grade 12