

# CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

## 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 to parent under Section 58.1 of the Education Act

- 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
  - (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

## 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*.

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2. 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
  
  - Reflect the neighborhood and community in which the school is located, as well as provincial, national and international contexts.
3. Teachers, students and others participating in studies or discussions of controversial issues shall exercise sensitivity to minimize the possibility that students and others are 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 50.1 shall be in writing and allow the parent reasonable time to request that their child be exempted from the instruction or exercise at issue.

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### APPENDIX A

#### STUDENT EXEMPTION UNDER SECTION 58.1 OF THE *EDUCATION ACT*

TO: Principal/Teacher of \_\_\_\_\_ (*identify school*) of Foothills School Division.

In response to the notice provided to me by the Board of Trustees of Foothills School Division dated \_\_\_\_\_ (*date of notice*) indicating that a course of program of studies in which my child is enrolled, or an instructional material or exercise used in a course of program of studies in which my child is enrolled, includes subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with \_\_\_\_\_ (*specify religion / human sexuality*)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of parent / legal guardian*),

in accordance with Section 58.1 of the *Education Act*, hereby request that my child,

\_\_\_\_\_ (*name of child*) be excluded from the instruction, exercise or the use of instructional material identified in this notice, and be assigned an alternative exercise for assessment (*if applicable*).

I request that my child: (*check relevant box*)

Leave the classroom or place where the instruction is taking place or where the instructional material is being used for the duration of that part of the instruction.

OR

Remain in the classroom or place where the instruction is taking place without taking part in the instruction or use of instructional material.

I confirm that I am the legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of child*)

and have chosen to exercise my option to have my child excluded from the instruction described in the notice from \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of school*)

on the dates indicated in the notice. I also confirm that it is my obligation to ensure that this form is returned to the school principal/teacher on or before the date of the instruction indicated in the notice.

The child of whom this exemption notice applies is:

\_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal Guardian / Independent Student

Reference: Relevant Legislation & Guidelines