

Administrative Procedures Manual	Administrative Procedure 205
	Controversial Issues in Education
	APPROVED: September 2013
Page 1 of 2	AMENDED/REVIEWED: September 2019, August 15, 2016
LEGAL REFERENCE:	Section 18, 52, 53, 196, 197, 222 Education Act Alberta Bill of Rights Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, Constitution Act, 1982 Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12

Background

Controversial issues are those topics which are publicly sensitive and on which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. By their nature, controversial issues generate diverse opinions and debate on the distinctions between right and wrong, justice and injustice, and on interpretations of fairness and tolerance. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree.

Opportunities to deal with sensitive issues and topics are an integral part of the education programs and schooling process in Alberta. Alberta Education recognizes that education cannot remain neutral on all issues or avoid all topics that are controversial. Alberta Education also recognizes that courses of study and education programs offered in Alberta schools must handle controversial issues in a manner that respects the rights and opinions reflected in different perspectives, but that rejects extreme or unethical positions.

For sound judgments to be made, students require experience in selecting, organizing and evaluating information. The educational benefits to be gained by studying controversial issues include the development of critical thinking, moral reasoning and an awareness and understanding of contemporary society.

Studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Such study provides opportunities to develop students' capabilities to think clearly, to reason logically, to open-mindedly and respectfully examine different points of view and to reach sound judgments.

Procedures

1. Sensitivity on the part of teachers, students and other participants in controversial issues shall be exercised to ensure that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed, intimidated or degraded for positions which they hold on controversial issues.
2. Information regarding controversial issues is to:
 - 2.1 Represent alternative points of view, subject to the condition that resources used are not restricted by any federal or provincial law;
 - 2.2 Appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students;
 - 2.3 Meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses of study and education programs; and
 - 2.4 Reflect the neighborhood and community in which the school is located, as well as provincial, national and international contexts.

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3. Controversial issues which have been anticipated by the teacher and those which may arise incidentally in the course of instruction are to be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry rather than advocacy, and to teach students how to think rather than what to think.
4. School staff are to play a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development, and shall handle parental decisions in regard to controversial issues with respect and sensitivity.
5. Diligent use of this Administrative Procedure is intended to limit the criticisms with regard to the information shared regarding controversial issues. It would, however, be unrealistic to assume that some information would not be challenged by students, parents and community members. The following procedures are to be followed with regard to information that is so challenged:
 - 5.1 Criticism of information being shared regarding controversial issues in education in a school is to be submitted in writing to the Principal with a copy to the Superintendent.
 - 5.2 If the issue cannot be resolved at the school level, the matter may be referred to the Superintendent.