

SAFE AND CARING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS

Background

The mission of our school division speaks to “nurturing” each student “to learn, live, fully, and serve others.” As further outlined in Board Policy 1, every effort to realize this mission is guided by values and core commitments that place the well-being of students as being at the forefront of the operation of our schools. Most importantly, our passion in this regard is motivated by our core belief that all students are “gifts from God.” For this reason, the Board will ensure that each student enrolled in our schools is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful, safe and Catholic environment that promotes the well-being of all students and fosters community support for achieving this goal. All efforts to further the safe and caring environment of a school must be in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Definitions

1. *Bullying* is hereby defined to respond to the Board’s responsibility to Section 45 (8) of the *School Act*, which stipulates that it must provide a safe and caring environment for all students. Bullying means repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by a student where the behaviour is intended by the student to cause harm, fear or distress to another individual in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to the individual’s reputation. Bullying often occurs in circumstances where one party endeavors to maintain power and control over another based upon systemic inequalities within a social setting. Parameters for addressing bullying are outlined within this procedure.
2. *Conflict in Relationship* occurs through single 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 in relationship between students may be dealt with through counseling, and / or Administrative Procedure 350: Student Conduct.
3. *Personal Harassment* refers to unwelcome, discriminatory conduct or behavior which is known or ought to be known to cause offense to another person. It is not a relationship of mutual consent.¹

¹ Definition as outlined within Harassment Administrative Procedure

4. *Sexual Harassment* refers to unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which is known or ought to be known to impact the well-being of another person.²

Harassment does not represent *conflict in relationship* and is a serious form of bullying that will be addressed through Administrative Procedure 358: Harassment.

5. *Restorative discipline* adds to the current discipline framework of schools. It promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches between students, home, church and school for being in community. These approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed. These approaches allow schools to act and respond in ways that are healing, rather than alienating, or coercive. Restorative Discipline is a strategy that a principal may use to address bullying within a school.³
6. *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 this 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:
 - 6.1 Basic / Universal Support:
Systemic teaching that produces a clear understanding of expectations is developed in a collaborative and respectful culture.
 - 6.2 Targeted Support:
Additional support is provided for those students who have not yet internalized appropriate responses to the expectations that they have been expected to follow.
 - 6.3 Individual / Intensive Support:
Highly focused support is established for those students who require ongoing adult monitoring in order to engage in appropriate behaviours.

Supporting Positive Behaviours is based upon a belief that teaching and nourishing appropriate behaviours has a far greater success than relying upon a model of consequences and punishment. This model is applied according to the age and stage of development of the learner and is a strategy that a principal may also use to address bullying within a school.⁴

² Definition as outlined within AP358: Harassment

³ Stutzman, Lorraine, Mullet, Judy H. (2005). *The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools*. Intercourse, PA: Goodbooks.

⁴ *Reaching Every Student* (A Resource for Planning for Diversity in Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools).

7. *Sanctity of Human Life* - Foundational principles of all Catholic social teaching is the sanctity of human life. Recognizing each human person as the image and likeness of God, the Catholic Church believes that the inherent dignity of the human person starts with conception and extends until natural death. The value of human life is valued above all material possessions in the world. This is the lens through which the district advocates for the safety and well-being of students within our schools.⁵
8. *Respect for the Human Person* - Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of mankind. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to man and woman. What is always at stake is the dignity of the human person, “whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.”⁶
9. *Catholic teaching on social relationships* recognizes all those called to a life with Christ as, simply and completely, children of God. Christians afford no other title to that giftedness other than to be called by name to a life of love and to be compelled, through discipleship, to share it abundantly with others. As St. Paul reminds us, “For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God, through faith. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3: 27-28).

Our students must respect the unique differences of every person, extending understanding and compassion to others. We do not limit or narrow our understanding of each other to specific traits that make us different. This would be a reductionist view of the human person. Rather, each of us is recognized for the entirety of our gifts and is called forth to contribute these gifts for the betterment of creation and the building of God’s kingdom. This understanding of the human person and God’s plan for each of us defines all of our social relationships. Our relationships, therefore, are characterized by generosity of self, mutual respect, and a desire for the good of the other.

10. *Chastity* – Our definition of chastity is rooted in God’s plan for us as human persons created in His image and likeness. Our bodies are, as St. Paul writes, “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6: 19), designed to reflect God’s love to the world. Gifted with our sexuality, we are called to express it with dignity and reverence and with purity of both body and mind. The challenge for each of us, young and old, is to control our desires and passions, to live our sexuality as the Father wills and in a way that honors God, ourselves, and others. To do so is to be chaste. For unmarried persons, “chastity entails abstinence [from sexual relations], because God’s design is that sex belongs in marriage.”⁷ Our sexuality is to be self-giving in nature, and the

⁵ CCCB (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ottawa, Ontario: CCCB Publishing, 2273, p. 465.

⁶ Ibid. 1929, p. 401.

⁷ Episcopal Commission for Doctrine (2011). *Pastoral Letter to Young People on Chastity*, Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., p. 3.

sexual act is to be unitive and procreative and exclusive to marriage, a union between a man and a woman.⁸

The Alberta Bishops' "A Resource for an Inclusive Community (2001)" remains an instructive pastoral resource for teachers and counselors in our ministry to students experiencing same sex attractions. *The Canadian Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter to Young People on Chastity* summarizes the importance of this resource by stating: "Persons who experience attraction to those of the same sex are also called to chastity. They too can grow in Christian holiness through a life of self-control, prayer, and the reception of the sacraments."⁹

Guidelines

1. All actions by students that impact the safety and well-being of students or staff or call into question a student's success in being accountable for his / her conduct to the successful operation of the school will be addressed through Administrative Procedure 350: Student Code of Conduct.
2. All schools and classrooms must enact procedures that support the following expectations with respect to bullying.
 - 2.1. No action toward another student, regardless of the intent of that action will cause harm, fear, or distress to that student.
 - 2.2. No action toward another student within the school community will diminish the student's reputation within the school community.
 - 2.3. Any action that contributes to a perception of bullying, whether it occurs during school time, or after school hours, or whether by electronic or other means, will be addressed by the school if it is determined that the actions impact the well-being of the alleged victim within the school community.
 - 2.4. Any action that humiliates or contributes to diminishing the reputation of a student because of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, ancestry, place of origin, marital status of parents, source of income of parents, family circumstances, or sexual orientation of a student is deemed to be an act of bullying.
 - 2.5. No report by a student that he / or she is being "bullied" will be ignored by a school official. The official will respond as if an incident has happened and report the incident to a teacher or principal.
 - 2.6. In establishing consequences for bullying, teachers and principals will use corrective interventions that consider the context of the circumstance, the behavioural history of the students involved, and the age / stage of development of the student.

⁸ Episcopal Commission for Doctrine (2011). *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction*, Ottawa, Ontario: Concacan Inc., p. 2.

⁹ Ibid. Chastity for Single Persons, p. 23.

- 2.7. If in the opinion of the teacher or principal an act of bullying has occurred, interventions will be applied dedicated to stopping the behaviour in the future, and educating the student victimized about how to address the issue in the future. Those disciplined for their involvement in bullying will be communicated what to “stop” doing, and “start” doing in order to further a safe and caring culture within the school.
- 2.8. 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.
- 2.9. A principal may use a Restorative Discipline or Positive Behavioural Support model to address matters of discipline.
- 2.10. 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 24 or 25 of the *School Act*.

Procedures

1. Schools must rely on district office support if existing resources or strategies are insufficient in addressing bullying within the school community.
2. In order to enhance an overall approach to supporting safe and caring learning environments for students, schools are encouraged to proactively ~~may~~ establish co-curricular learning opportunities where an enhanced cause for promoting respect for the human person may be established. These co-curricular learning opportunities may be in the form of a club or group that independently exists for all students, or are a component of the principal's student advisory body, or student council of the school. These types of student organizations may be developed at the grades 4 – 12 level and will address themes that are complementary to the focuses of health and religious education programs being addressed within the school.
3. Should a student or group of students seek the establishment of a club or group supporting the intent of guideline 2, the student or group of students will consult with the principal and the principal will use the CCSSA LIFE Framework (Appendix 1) as a mechanism to evaluate the request and determine the appropriate support for the student(s).
4. Students clubs or groups seeking to address matters involving sexual identity will normally be established at the grades 7 – 12 level. Students who wish to address matters involving sexual identity through a student organization will do so by approaching the Principal who will use District services and the LIFE Framework (Appendix 1) to determine the scope of support required (advocacy, peer support, counselling). Principals will be legislatively supported in their capacity to make such decisions through the application of Section 20(c) of the School Act.
 - 4.1. The principal, in consultation with other district staff will approve or amend the request based upon its capacity to uphold the sanctity of human life through acts of justice / social action while upholding Catholic teaching on social relationships. The principal will use the LIFE Framework as a mechanism to determine the kind of school based support that will be used for students.

- 4.2. The principal must establish the supervisory and educational authority of the activity through the designation of a staff advisor who will monitor and support the student group.
- 4.3. The principal must clarify the objectives of the group with the staff advisor before meeting with students.
- 4.4. The principal must provide in-service for staff advisors regarding the purpose for the student group and how the group can be supported.
- 4.5. The principal must approve materials used within the student group and maintain supervision over conversations that support the intent of FOIPP legislation within the province.
- 4.6. The staff advisor must be present for all meetings from beginning to end and use the mission, vision, and core values of the district, Catholic teaching on social relationships and the Church's definition of chastity as a basis for advising students within their work. When matters arise within these groups that necessitate the intervention of outside agencies, these may be involved subject to their capacity to support the intention of this administrative procedure.
- 4.7. Student groups that further the intent of this administrative procedure must through their activities demonstrate an understanding and respect for the sanctity of human life, respect for the human person, Catholic teaching on social relationships, and Church teaching on chastity as outlined within this procedure. This implies that full cooperation with the expectations of the staff supervisor is of paramount importance. Failure to work cooperatively with staff supervisors in order to contribute to a positive environment within the group or school community, will result in individual participation within the group being restricted, or the dissolving of the group itself.
- 4.8. A name for student groups seeking to further respect for the human person will be approved by the principal, in consultation with the superintendent, will incorporate language in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic church, and will respect the intent of this administrative procedure.
- 4.9. A general notice will be provided to all schools in a student handbook or through a letter addressed to parents indicating that students may be organizing Diversity clubs at the school in the future.
- 4.10. If a Diversity club is formed in a school, notification of the formation of the club will be sent to all parents (not naming of any students involved in the formation of the clubs). This notification will include the responsibility of parents to discuss with their child the purpose and nature of the club, whether their child wishes to become a member and their child's obligation to both refrain from bullying behavior and contribute to a safe learning school environment that respects diversity. At all times, parents are invited to converse with the school regarding the intention of the Diversity club.

Revision Dates: May 25, 2015



CCSSA's LIFE Framework

"Lived Inclusion for Everyone"

Background

Catholic Schools share a foundational belief that all children are loved by God, are individually unique and that the school has a mission to help each student to fulfill their God-given potential in all aspects of their person: physically, academically, socially, morally and spiritually.

Specific background resources for LIFE Framework: Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA) *Safe and Caring Learning Environments for Students*, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA) *Commitment to Inclusive Communities*, and Calgary Catholic School District's (CSSD) *Supporting Inclusive Communities*.

Commitment to the LIFE Framework

Catholic Schools are committed to using the LIFE Framework as a guideline for the creation and operation of student groups that are comprehensive in their approach to inclusion and open to the exploration in a Catholic context of a variety of issues including bullying, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity, discrimination, justice, and respectful relationships and language.

Naming of LIFE Framework student groups

Names for student groups seeking to further respect the human person will be approved by the principal, in consultation with the chief superintendent, will incorporate language in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church, and will respect the intent of this document.

Who might be served by LIFE Framework student groups?

- All students

Guidelines for the Formation of student groups

Because some students, especially those with same sex attractions, and those who identify with different genders, as well as those who experience discrimination or isolation based on body image, race, culture, language, performance in school, social anxiety/lack of social connection, or other individual attributes, may be at-risk, it is advised that every school be well prepared to establish student groups to address these needs. Such groups should be formed when there is a student request.

When students wish to form a group, it is important to determine the nature of the request and how best to meet the expressed needs. 'What are you looking for?' Through conversations with students, the purpose for the group needs to be identified, so it can be properly structured within the guidelines. Flexibility and responsiveness, based on needs, is critical. Student groups may be formed for the following purposes:

- Advocacy
- Peer support
- Counselling

In each type of group, issues that result in discrimination and bullying may be addressed, including, but not limited to:

- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Gender
- Body image

- Race, culture or language
- Performance in school
- Social rejection, peer acceptance

General norms also govern all types of student groups. Groups shall:

- Support the mission, vision and core values of the school and the school jurisdiction while upholding the sanctity of human life through discussions, acts of justice, and social action within the context of Catholic teaching on social relationships.
- Reflect through name and action the philosophy and theology of communion and emphasize inclusion, hospitality, respect and justice.

Since each type of group addresses different needs (advocacy, peer support, counselling), specific guidelines and additional norms follow:

Advocacy Groups

Purpose

- To advocate against all forms of discrimination and/or behaviours that cause students to feel isolated and not included.
- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via initiatives designed to advocate against all forms of discrimination.
- To enable students to feel empowered to activate their unique God-given gifts for the benefit of furthering a more just community for everyone.
- To discuss issues that cause pervasive harm to young people in society.

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and assisted, when possible, by counselors, chaplains or social workers.
- Be open from a Catholic perspective to exploration of a variety of issues, including sexual orientation, gender identity, bullying, discrimination, justice, and respectful relationships and language.
- Ensure advocacy efforts are directed against all forms of bullying and discrimination.

Activities

- Exploring how inclusive practices enhance the life of the school (e.g. celebrating a school's success annually through a variety of means).
- Sponsoring activities throughout the school year to address these areas (i.e. bullying awareness week activities, peer advocacy, guest speakers, and frequent liaison with the school principal).
- Promoting whole school social justice activities to address needs locally, nationally or internationally.

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Peer Support Groups

Purpose

- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via facilitated discussions.

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and assisted, when possible, by counselors, chaplains or social workers.
- Ensure boundaries prior to the discussion of any topic, so members do not feel pressured to make personal disclosures.
- Invite, but not pressure, other students to join them.
- Be sensitive to the safety of all students who are at risk.
- Refrain from labeling or discussing students who are not members.
- Consider inviting students to develop additional norms and procedures with the facilitator carefully guiding this process.

Activities

- Exploring those areas with staff facilitators where inclusion could be improved (e.g. student group discussions as per “norms” outlined through the leadership of the facilitator).

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Counselling Groups

Purpose

- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via facilitated discussions.
- To support students experiencing a variety of challenges related to feelings of belonging, self-worth, identity, friendship, etc.
- To support students who may be marginalized as a result of bullying or social exclusion based on gender, sexual orientation, culture, size, physical or academic ability, etc.
- To support students in understanding their sexual identities who may be experiencing a variety of challenges related to their sexuality (e.g. how to talk to parents, friends, etc.).

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and counsellors, and assisted as needed by psychologists, chaplains or social workers.
- If a student discloses information to a staff member regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity, it is important to remember that they have a right to confidentiality unless student well-being is at risk.
- Ensure all normal processes for group counselling are followed.
- Be sensitive to the safety of all students who are at risk.
- Refrain from labeling or discussing students who are not members.

Activities

- Utilize counselling strategies to address group needs.

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Facilitation of Student Groups:

- As faith guides, strengthening every aspect of Catholic education, facilitators integrate prayer, scripture, and Catholic teaching (e.g. 'the dignity of the human person' and 'a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable') into their discussions as appropriate. The groups will be permeated in a manner consistent with all Catholic school programming.
- Student groups shall be facilitated by a Catholic teacher and approved by the principal.
- The principal shall ensure the facilitator(s) receives in-service or information on both relevant Catholic teachings and the facilitation of group discussion.
- At the principal's discretion, if the school has a counsellor, social worker, Family School Liaison Worker (FSLW), chaplain or a staff member with a similar designation, that staff member should co-facilitate.
- The facilitator(s) shall attend every meeting.

Informing parents about LIFE Framework student groups:

The Alberta Bill of Rights, s.1 (g) recognizes that parents have both the right to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. The second paragraph of the preamble to the School Act and paragraph eight of the preamble of the Education Act (upon proclamation), recognizes parent's rights and responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children.

The following two step process is recommended to advise parents regarding the formation of LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs:

Step 1 – A general notice is provided to the school community (recommended inclusion in annual student handbook) that students may be organizing LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs at the school in the future.

Step 2 – If a LIFE Framework/Diversity club is formed in a school, notification of the formation of the club is sent to all parents (not naming of any students involved in the formation of the clubs). This notification includes the responsibility of parents to discuss with their child the purpose and nature of the club, whether their child wishes to become a member and their child's obligation to both refrain from bullying behavior and contribute to a safe learning school environment that respects diversity. At all times parents are invited to converse with the school regarding the intention of the LIFE Framework/Diversity Club.

Section 16.1 of the School Act or Section 35.1 of the Education Act whichever is in force:

Support for student organizations

16.1(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

(a) permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and

(b) 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.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an organization or activity includes an organization or activity that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

(3) The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization, including the name “gay-straight alliance” or “queerstraight alliance”, after consulting with the principal.

(4) 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 subsection (1), 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.

(5) If a staff member indicates to a principal a willingness to act as a staff liaison under subsection (1),

(a) a principal shall not inform a board or the Minister under subsection (4) that no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison, and

(b) that staff member shall be deemed to be available to serve as the staff liaison.

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