

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Background

Members of the community may request that religious studies or alternative religious programs be offered in schools. The Division understands the limits of its authority to provide alternative religious programs under Section 21 of the School Act as well as to prescribe religious instruction under Section 50 of the School Act. The Division, therefore, approves of the provision of an optional alternative religious program or of optional religious studies on a school-by-school basis to accommodate the desires of the school community. The Division also authorizes conducting religious activities of a non-denominational and non-proselytizing nature that are acceptable to parents and staff in schools of the Division.

Procedures

1. The Division encourages the establishment of optional alternative religious programs in communities where numbers warrant. Such religious programs shall comply with Administrative Procedure 220 – Alternative Programs. Alternative religious programs may stress education from a particular religious point of view but will not be a public act of worship or manifestation of a particular faith.
 - 1.1 A Principal may identify guidelines including minimum opt-in levels of participation when determining whether to proceed with or continue to offer the alternative religious program.
 - 1.2 Instruction for students who do not opt into the alternative religious program shall not be hindered in their educational program due to the offering of the alternative religious program.
2. The Division encourages the offering of locally developed or acquired and authorized religious studies courses. Such courses shall comply with Administrative Procedure 219 – Locally Developed or Acquired and Authorized Courses.
 - 2.1 Junior high religious studies courses must be offered as complementary courses.
 - 2.2 Where junior high schools offer religious studies courses, they are encouraged to offer the grade eight Ethics course authorized by Alberta Education.
 - 2.3 Where senior high schools offer religious studies courses, they are encouraged to offer Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meanings 20 and World Religions 30 as authorized by Alberta Education.
3. Religious studies in regular classrooms in the Division will be characterized by the following objectives:
 - 3.1 Religious education will assist the student to develop a sound basis for making moral decisions;
 - 3.2 Religious education will assist the student to develop a knowledge and understanding of religion in such areas as politics, economics, history, art, literature and music;

- 3.3 Religious education will assist the student to develop tolerance, understanding and respect for the religious beliefs of others.
4. Religious studies in the regular classroom shall identify religion as a subject for study, not as a public act of worship or manifestation of faith. Teachers are encouraged to involve students in the objective discussion of religious, moral, and spiritual topics whenever such topics become relevant in the curriculum.
 - 4.1 Where religion is an aspect of existing units in social studies and other subjects, this aspect is to be given adequate treatment.
 - 4.2 Where learning in any subject area could be made more meaningful through the addition of a treatment of some facet(s) of religion, teachers could develop new learning experiences to provide students with greater understanding of religion.
 - 4.3 Open discussion of moral and ethical questions by teachers and students is encouraged in formal and informal learning situations.
 - 4.4 Teachers may state their own religious beliefs as such, when questioned by students or where relevant in the curriculum.
 - 4.4.1 In making such statements, the personal nature of the belief must be stressed in order that the objectivity of the discussion may be maintained.
 - 4.4.2 Any hint of proselytizing shall be avoided.
5. Religious activities may take the form of opening exercises in the classroom or the observance of days or seasons of religious significance.
 - 5.1 This Administrative Procedure shall be taken as a statement of support for the usual school observances of Christmas and Easter celebrations as long as the rights of students of other religious beliefs are respected.
 - 5.2 Opening exercises at the school or classroom level may consist of, but are not limited to, any or all of the following:
 - 5.2.1 Reciting the Lord's Prayer or reading an appropriate prayer.
 - 5.2.2 A short discussion period or a thought for the day, which may be selected by teachers and students from a variety of sources, both religious and secular.
 - 5.3 The total time for opening exercises shall not exceed ten (10) minutes.
 - 5.4 Principals who implement discretionary opening exercises at either the school or classroom level, shall include in the school handbook a statement advising the parents of the practice, the general format of the exercises, and the process of opting out of the opening exercises.

Reference: Section 3, 18, 20, 21, 26, 39, 50, 50.1, 60, 61, 113 School Act
Alberta Bill of Rights
Alberta Human Rights Act
Remembrance Day Act
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act, 1982
Guide to Education ECS to Grade 12

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