

## SAFE AND CARING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

### Background

The mission of Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools (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 and staff 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 and staff are “children of God.” For this reason, the Board will ensure that each student enrolled in our schools and each staff member working on behalf of students is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful, safe and Catholic environment that promotes the well-being of all students and staff 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. *Diversity Club* refers to student organizations and activities that intend to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging for students.
2. As defined in Harassment Administrative Procedure 358 – Division Students (“AP 358”) and Harassment Administrative Procedure 460 – Employees (“AP 460”), *Harassment*<sup>1</sup> may include a single incident or a series of events.

For the purpose of this AP 359, *Harassment*, *Sexual Harassment* and *Bullying* and/or *Workplace Bullying* are collectively referred to as “Harassment:”<sup>2</sup>

2.1 *Harassment* refers to derogatory (e.g., excessively critical, insulting, belittling) or vexatious (e.g., aggressive, angry, antagonistic) conduct or comments that are known or ought reasonably to be known to be offensive or unwelcome. Harassment includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a) any objectionable comment, act, or display that demeans, belittles, or causes personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat;
- b) conduct or comments involving any of the prohibited grounds of harassment and discrimination as defined in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

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<sup>1</sup> See definitions’ section in AP 358 Harassment (Division Students) and AP 460 Harassment (Employees).

<sup>2</sup> See definitions’ section in AP 358 Harassment (Division Students) and AP 460 Harassment (Employees).

2.2 *Sexual Harassment* includes comments, gestures or physical conduct of a sexual nature where an individual knows or ought reasonably to know that the behaviour is unwelcome and personally offensive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- a) inappropriate or derogatory comments, humour, insults or behaviour based on gender and/or gender expression, gender identity;
- b) inappropriate, lewd, or sexually offensive written, graphic or behavioural displays on school board property;
- c) inappropriate, lewd, or sexually offensive slogans or graphics displayed on clothing worn on school board property or during school-related activities;
- d) inappropriate conversation, physical touching, or leering that could be construed to be a sexual advance;
- e) inappropriate conversation regarding an individual's sexual behaviour;
- f) unsolicited and/or unwanted requests to engage in sexual activity;
- g) reprisal or threat of reprisal against an individual for rejecting a sexual solicitation or advance.

2.3 *Workplace Bullying and/or Bullying*<sup>3</sup> refers to repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual where the behaviour is intended 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.

2.4 Reference to the definition of *Harassment*<sup>4</sup> in this administrative procedure is intended to support the Board's responsibility at section 33(1) of the *Education Act* to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, and section 11(1) of the *Education Act* to establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation under subsection (1) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

3. *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 division advocates for the safety and well-being of students and our staff within our schools.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This definition is found in the definition sections of Harassment AP 460 (Employees) and Harassment AP 358 (Students).

<sup>4</sup> See Harassment AP 460 (Employees) and Harassment AP 358 (Students).

<sup>5</sup> CCCB (1994). Catechism of the Catholic Church, Ottawa, Ontario: CCCB Publishing, 2273, p. 465.

4. *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.

5. **Welcoming, Inclusive, Caring, Respectful, Safe Catholic School Environment**

All students, staff and families of the School Division will be provided with an inclusive, welcoming, caring, respectful, safe and Catholic environment that promotes the well-being of all and fosters a sense of belonging.

6. **Respectful Student Conduct**

The School Division supports the consistent implementation of a variety of supportive strategies<sup>6</sup> to teach responsible behaviours to its students, which:

- a) promote values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches between students, home, church and school for being in community; and
- b) validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed.

Schools are encouraged to utilize a wide range of interventions and consequences, including Supporting Positive Behaviours<sup>7</sup> and Restorative Discipline<sup>8</sup> to reinforce positive behaviours and to help students better understand the consequences of their choices and further their social responsibility. These approaches allow schools to act and respond in ways that are healing, rather than alienating, or coercive.

7. **Harassment and Bullying and Codes of Conduct**

The School Division does not support Harassment in any of its schools and/or sites or at

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<sup>6</sup> See AP 350– Student Discipline Framework, at para. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

all. To this end the School Division has implemented (and revised) the following Administrative Procedures:

- a) New Administrative Procedure – Student Discipline Framework Administrative Procedure 350
- b) Revised Harassment Administrative Procedure 460 (Employees)
- c) Revised Harassment Administrative Procedure 358 (Division Students)
- d) Revised Code of Conduct Review to Address Bullying Behaviour Administrative Procedure 360
- e) Revised Accommodating and Respecting Gender Identity and Expression Administrative Procedure 361
- f) Revised Use of Technology Administrative Procedure 140
- g) Revised Social Media Administrative Procedure 149

### **Guidelines**

1. All schools and classrooms must enact procedures that focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that support the following expectations with respect to Bullying:
  - a) No action toward another student, regardless of the intent of that action, will or is intended to cause harm, fear, or distress to that student;
  - b) No action toward another student within the school community will or intend to diminish the student’s reputation within the school community;
  - c) 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;
  - d) Any action that humiliates or contributes to diminishing the reputation of a student because of race, religious beliefs, colour, physical disability, mental disability, ancestry, age, place of origin, marital status of parents, source of income of parents, family circumstances, gender expression, or gender identity of a student, may be applicable to an assessment of harassment.
  - e) No report by a student that he / or she is being “harassed” or “bullied” will be ignored by a school official. The official will report the incident to the school principal who shall investigate the matter and act in accordance with Harassment Administrative Procedure 358 (Students) as required.
  - f) 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.<sup>9</sup>

- g) 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 supporting the victimized student. 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;
- h) 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 applicable administrative procedures and practices, including Harassment Administrative Procedures 358 (Division Students) and 460 (Employees).

## 2. Student Considerations

- 2.1. Students will not be discriminated against according to the application that the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has to the School Board as a Catholic Separate<sup>10</sup> school division.
- 2.2. All actions by students that impact the safety and well-being of students or staff will be addressed through the Student Discipline Framework AP 350 and the Harassment AP 358 (Division Students) as appropriate.
- 2.3. The expectation for students in all their school-related interactions that pertain to the School Division is that they:
  - a) conduct themselves in a manner which upholds the dignity and worth of all members of the school community;
  - b) be aware of and adhere to their school’s code of conduct; and
  - c) be aware of this administrative procedure.
- 2.4. No report by a student that s/he is being “bullied” is to be ignored by a school official, who will report the matter to the school principal as required by Harassment AP 358 (Division Students).
- 2.5. In establishing consequences for Bullying, teachers and principals may use corrective interventions<sup>11</sup> that consider the context of the circumstance, the behavioural history of the students involved, and the age / stage of development of the student.
- 2.6. If in the opinion of the teacher or principal an act of Bullying has occurred, interventions may be applied dedicated to stopping the behaviour in the future, and to providing reasonable supports to the victimized student.
- 2.7. Appropriate interventions and supports will be provided to the student who has

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<sup>9</sup> See AP 350– Student Discipline Framework

<sup>10</sup> See *1905 Alberta Act*

<sup>11</sup> See AP 350 – Student Discipline Framework.

engaged in wrongdoing to ensure that the student establishes productive, positive behaviors in the future.

### 3. Staff Considerations

3.1. School Division staff will not be discriminated against according to the application that the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has to the School Board as a Catholic Separate<sup>12</sup> School Division.

3.2. Staff are expected to:

- a) support students to help them develop an understanding of themselves as children of God and foster a sense of self-worth;
- b) provide to students (and to be provided by students) a welcoming, caring and positive school environment that supports mutual respect and respects diversity;
- c) respect the privacy and confidentiality of students and only discuss personal student information on a need to know basis;
- d) ensure that activities or practices that segregate or differentiate children based on ability, gender, or other characteristics reduced to the greatest extent possible;
- e) take all required actions in reporting and following up on student Harassment in accordance with Harassment AP 358 (Division Students) and Harassment AP 460 (Employees).

### 4. School Considerations

4.1. To enhance an overall approach to supporting safe and caring learning environments for students, schools are encouraged to proactively 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 may address themes that are complementary to the focuses of health and religious education programs being addressed within the school.

## **Procedures**

1. Student clubs or groups seeking to address matters involving sexual identity tend to generally be established at the grades 7 – 12 level. Students who wish to address matters involving sexual identity through a student organization:
  - a) will do so by approaching a school staff member who will confer with the school principal to determine the scope of support required / available (advocacy, peer support, etc);

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<sup>12</sup> See 1905 *Alberta Act*.

- b) may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization or activity.
2. The principal will use the LIFE Framework as a resource to assist in providing school-based support that may be used for / made available to students. Principals are legislatively supported in their capacity to make such decisions through the application of sections 2 and 197 of the *Education Act*.
  3. Should a student or group of students request a school staff member 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, that staff school staff member will consult with the principal who will use the CCSSA LIFE Framework to determine the appropriate supports for the student(s).
  4. The school principal shall:
    - a) grant permission for the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school;
    - b) within a reasonable timeframe of said student request, designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate the establishment, and ongoing operation, of the student organization or to assist in organizing the activity;
    - c) clarify the objectives of the group with the staff advisor before meeting with students;
    - d) provide in-service support for staff advisors regarding the purpose for the student group and how the group can be supported;
    - e) approve materials used within the student group and maintain supervision over conversations that support the intent of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (*FOIP*) within the province. The disclosure of personal information of any student, staff member, parent or other individual by the School Division is governed by *FOIP*.
  5. The staff advisor must be present for all meetings from beginning to end and use the mission, vision, and core values of the school division. Catholic teaching on social relationships (as defined in this procedure) and the Church's definition of chastity will serve 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.
  6. 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, may result in individual participation within the group being restricted, or the dissolving of the group itself.

7. The school principal is responsible for ensuring that notification respecting a voluntary student organization is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity; and is otherwise consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other student organizations and activities.
8. If a Diversity club is formed in a school, notification of the establishment of the club will be sent to all parents (not naming any students involved in the formation of the clubs). Notification to parents will consist of the following messages in a school newsletter:  
*We are pleased to announce that at (insert name of school), we are proceeding with a diversity group as explained in Section 35.1(1) of the Education Act and in our Division Administrative Procedure 359 with a meeting planned for (insert date).*
9. As legislatively mandated by Section 11(1) of the *Education Act*, the text of sections 35.1 (1), (3), (4) of the *Education Act* are herein reproduced:
  - 35.1(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.
  - (3)** The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization, including the name “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight 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.

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