

STUDENT GROUPS

Background

The Catholic faith respects all individuals. The goal of each Catholic school is to create for all of its students, a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment, consistent with Catholic teachings, which respects diversity, fosters a sense of belonging and affirms the rights of each student as provided in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

As such, Evergreen Catholic Separate Regional Division No.2 (the “Board”) considers violence, harassment and/or bullying on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, sexual orientation or any other immutable characteristic to be unacceptable. Please see the Board’s relevant Safe and Caring Schools Administrative Procedure 160.

The Board supports the use of positive practices to prevent such behaviour and recognizes that student groups and activities may assist in creating the desired learning environment.

Accordingly, students are permitted by the *School Act* to establish gay-straight alliances, groups and activities (collectively, “Groups”).

Objectives

The objectives of such Groups include the following:

- To support and affirm the dignity of all students in all aspects of school life regardless of their immutable characteristics;
- To improve understandings of the lives of all students and find ways to increase respect for the dignity of each other in ways appropriate to the school setting;
- To clarify and give definition to appropriate terms, behaviours and actions to promote greater awareness of and responsiveness to, the deleterious effects of bullying, harassment and hate-motivated violence;
- To promote timely and effective responses to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment and hate-motivated violence to ensure the maximization of safety for all pupils;

- To provide education for all students consistent with the Catholic faith with respect to bullying, harassment and hate-motivated violence prevention in schools;
- To provide resources consistent with the Catholic faith to support pupils who are impacted by bullying, harassment and hate-motivated violence;
- To provide opportunities for pastoral and spiritual guidance for young people; and
- To encourage students to report incidents of bullying, harassment and bias, prejudice or hate-motivated violence safely in a manner that minimizes the possibility of reprisal or breach of confidentiality and is consistent with best practices in relation to counselling and/or Chaplaincy involvement.

Principle

All Groups shall promote a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging (the “Principle”).

Procedures

1. 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 submit a written proposal in the form attached as Appendix “A” (the “Proposal”) for the review of the principal of the school. The nature, purpose, and objective(s) of the Group shall be clearly articulated.
2. The principal shall immediately grant permission for the establishment and holding of the Group at the school if it is consistent with the Principle. The principal will consult with division staff and use the LIFE Framework as developed by the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (April 20, 2018) to determine the kind of school based support that will be required for the students.
3. Within a reasonable time from the date that the principal receives and accepts the Proposal, the principal shall:
 - 3.1 Carefully consider which teacher (the “Staff Advisor”) is most appropriate to serve as supervisory and educational authority, and act as the staff liaison to facilitate and support the establishment and the ongoing operation of the Group. The Staff Advisor must be an individual who is knowledgeable about and committed to Catholic teaching. If no staff member is willing to serve as Staff Advisor then the principal shall immediately inform the Board and the Minister of Education (the “Minister”), and the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing or facilitating the establishment and the ongoing operation of the Group; and

- 3.2 Clarify the objectives of the Group with the Staff Advisor and, as time permits without delaying or hindering the formation and activities of the group, provide any necessary in-service or consult with pastoral leaders in the community regarding the objectives and activities of the Group.
4. The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the Group after consulting with the principal. However, if consulted by one or more students, the principal shall permit, in accordance with the *School Act*, any Group to be named “gay-straight alliance”, “queer-straight alliance”, or another name provided that such name is respectful and inclusive. The principal shall not prohibit or discourage students from choosing a name that includes “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”.

For greater clarity, the *School Act* also requires the Division to reproduce the text of certain *School Act* sections in this administrative procedure.

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) immediately grant permission for the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and (b) subject to subsection (4), within a reasonable time from the date that the principal receives the request 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 or activity, including the name “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”, after consulting with the principal.

(3.1) For greater certainty, the principal shall not prohibit or discourage students from choosing a name that includes “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”.

(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.

(6) The principal is responsible for ensuring that notification, if any, respecting a voluntary student organization or an activity referred to in subsection (1) is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity

5. The principal is responsible for providing a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, and for ensuring that:
 - 5.1 any approved Group is supervised and supported;
 - 5.2 parental notification respecting a Group is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity. The principal is responsible for ensuring that notification, if any, respecting any student Group is limited to the fact of the establishment of the Group or holding of the activity, and is consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other organizations and activities;
 - 5.3 a FOIP request seeking information that relates to identifying students attending a Group must be denied with reference to the *School Act* provisions prohibiting such

disclosure, unless an exemption applies;

- 5.4 Vulnerable students have access to support from social workers, child and youth workers, and/or Chaplaincy staff members, where deemed necessary by the principal or Staff Advisor;
 - 5.5 If a child is in need of intervention as defined by the *Child Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, or there is a concern that the child is in danger of self-harm or harm by others, the school shall follow the protocol and guidance set out in the Teaching Profession Act (<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/T02.pdf>) and the ATA Code of Professional Conduct (<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Teachers-as-Professionals/IM-4E%20Code%20of%20Professional%20Conduct.pdf>); and
 - 5.6 Groups are not used for protest against or advocacy for anything that is not in accordance with the Catholic faith foundation of the school.
6. The Staff Advisor must be present for each Group meeting or activity in its entirety.
 7. All materials for use in a Group, including materials for school/community awareness must be reviewed and approved by the Staff Advisor and administration.
 8. The principal or the Staff Advisor may invite the Chaplaincy leader to participate in Group meetings whenever possible.
 9. All mentors and supervisors of the Group must know and be committed to Catholic teachings.
 10. The principal must provide in-service for staff advisor(s) regarding the purpose for the student group, how the group can be supported and to increase their knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes in respecting diversity and understanding issues related to gender identity and/or gender expression in relation to the Catholic faith as well as the greater society.
 11. All outside speakers invited to participate in a Group must respect Catholic teachings and must be approved by the principal.
 12. All students involved in a Group must agree to respect the personal privacy of student participants. Restrictions shall be placed on the use of personal electronic devices during meetings, posting personal information on social media sites, or disclosure of personal information in any other manner. Failure to comply with these restrictions may result in the suspension of the Group and/or one or more Group members.
 13. If a matter arises that requires the involvement and/or intervention of outside agencies (such as law enforcement) these services should be sought at the earliest opportunity.
 14. The school will ensure that confidentiality is maintained by students participating in the Group and any related activities.

Reference: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Individual Rights Protection Act
Alberta Human Rights Act
School Act; Alberta Bill of Rights
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act