

WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Background

HPSD is committed to providing each enrolled student and every employed staff member with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. The division affirms the rights, as provided for in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, of each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a HPSD school. Further HPSD, will endeavor to ensure each staff member employed by the board and each student enrolled in a school operated by the board will not be discriminated against as provided for in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* or the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Guiding Principles

Each student is unique and has differing needs. Individuals have the right to be open about who they are including expressing their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression without fear of unwanted consequences and also have the right to privacy and confidentiality. Schools will ensure that all students feel safe and secure in seeking the supports they need. When identifying and addressing student needs, schools will respond using a continuum of supports and services that consider: universal supports; targeted strategies or interventions; individualized supports. First, and foremost, schools will focus on development of an environment that promotes equality of opportunity, dignity and respect.

Prevention Strategies

A positive school culture is a crucial component of prevention of behavioural concerns. This takes into consideration a whole school approach that promotes expectations for a safe, caring, respectful, healthy, diverse, inclusive environment. The Alberta School Boards Association identifies a safe and secure school culture as, “one that is physically, emotionally and psychologically safe characterized by:

- Caring
- Common values and beliefs
- Respect for democratic values, rights and responsibilities
- Respect for cultural diversity
- Respect for law and order
- Common social expectations
- Clear and consistent behavioural expectations
- Appropriate and positive role modelling by staff and students
- Respect for individual differences
- Effective anger-management strategies and
- Community, family, student and staff involvement.”

Procedures

1. Each school shall develop and implement school-wide character education to actively promote and support the development of positive behaviours inclusive of:
 - 1.1. Assessment of the existing school culture. This may be accomplished through surveys and/or consultation and involves wide representation staff, students, parents, community members)
 - 1.2. Development of an age-appropriate definition of bullying behaviours;
 - 1.3. Strategies students can use to prevent or respond to bullying behaviours;
 - 1.4. Specific roles for administrators, teachers, support staff, students and parents;
 - 1.5. School-wide implementation of a code of conduct and strategies to teach social responsibility;
 - 1.6. Recognition and organization of activities for active participation in Bully Awareness and Prevention Week.
2. Inclusive environments demonstrate respect for diversity. Every individual has unique needs resulting in the need for flexible and responsive environments that foster a sense belonging, inclusiveness and provide access to resources and opportunities. The principal shall:
 - 2.1. Ensure awareness and adherence to legislation protecting Albertans from discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression;

- 2.2. Ensure staff utilize language and educational resources and approaches that are inclusive, age-appropriate and respectful of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions;
- 2.3. Provide a flexible and gender-inclusive dress code that recognizes all students and staff have a right to dress appropriately in a manner consistent with their gender identity or gender expression;

Support for Student Organizations

3. All students should be given opportunity to participate in school activities or programs. To the greatest extent possible, students shall be given the options to be included in the organization or group that corresponds to their gender identity.
4. High Prairie School Division supports student organizations in accordance with the *School Act*, Sections 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.
 - (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 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.
 - (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.
 - (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, and (2)

is otherwise consistent with the usual practices relating to notifications of other student organizations and activities.

5. The principal shall:
 - 5.1. Reduce gender-segregated activities to the greatest extent possible. In circumstances where it is necessary to organize activities according to gender, students who are trans and gender-diverse have the support they need to participate safely in accordance with their gender identity and/or gender expression;
 - 5.2. Ensure staff will not refer students to programs or services that attempt to change or repair a student's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Washroom/Change Room Access and Accommodation

6. Staff shall consistently demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and safety of all students with respect to washroom and change room facilities. The principal shall ensure:
 - 6.1. All students have access to washrooms that are congruent with their gender identity;
 - 6.2. All students have access to change-room facilities that meet their individual and privacy concerns;
 - 6.3. Ensure that individual solutions to washrooms and change room access are implemented with respect and discretion.
 - 6.4. Overnight accommodations need to be addressed on a case by case basis. School staff should make reasonable effort to provide solutions which are respectful and inclusive of the student, do not impose additional expense and are respectful of the privacy rights of all students involved.

Disclosure of Information

7. HPSD is bound by the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. Any disclosure of personal information will be done in accordance with that Act.

References

School Act

Alberta Human Rights Act

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learner Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Inclusive Education Policy Framework: Creating a Shared Vision

The Heart of the Matter, Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools