

CREATING WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL & SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

What's New in the *School Act*?

Effective June 1, 2015

Students are better able to achieve success and a positive sense of self when schools are inclusive, welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe. These environments support students in building healthy relationships with others, value diversity and demonstrate respect, empathy, and compassion.

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (formerly Bill 10) came into effect on June 1, 2015. In addition to enshrining sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in the Alberta Bill of Rights as protected grounds from discrimination, the Act amended the *School Act* to include:

- a definition of bullying;
- students', parents' and school boards' responsibilities, as they relate to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self;
- a requirement for school boards to support students to create gay-straight-alliances (GSAs) or queer straight alliances (QSAs) in their schools; and,
- a requirement for school boards to address bullying by creating and implementing a policy that includes a code of conduct for students. The code of conduct must be publicly available, reviewed every year, and provided to all staff, students and parents. The *School Act* outlines the elements which need to be contained in the code of conduct.

The amended *School Act* is available at www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf
Information about responsibilities of students, parents/guardians and school staff is available at: www.education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent/safeschools.aspx

- **Bullying is defined as** repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual's reputation.
- Students have the responsibility to refrain from, report and not tolerate bullying or bullying behaviour.
- Each year the 3rd week in November is recognized as **Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week**.

Support for Student Organizations/Activities

If a student requests to establish a voluntary student organization or lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging, the principal shall:

- permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity;
- designate a staff member to act as a liaison; and,
- inform the school board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as the liaison and the Minister will appoint a responsible adult.

Students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization, including the name "Gay-Straight Alliance" or "Queer-Straight Alliance" after consultation with the principal.

More information is available at:

www.education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent/safeschools.aspx

Elements of a code of conduct:

- a statement of purpose that provides a rationale for the code of conduct, with a focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments;
- one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*;
- one or more statements about what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means; and,
- one or more statements about the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, which must take account of the student's age, maturity and individual circumstances, and which must ensure that support is provided for the students who are impacted by inappropriate behaviour, as well as for students who engage in inappropriate behaviour.

More information can be found at

www.education.alberta.ca/media/15307907/developinganeffectivestudentcodeofconduct.pdf

Additional Resources:

The Alberta School Boards Association has developed a policy advisory for welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments: www.asba.ab.ca/services/resources/policy-advice/welcoming-caring-respectful-and-safe-learning-and-working-environments/

Walk Around: A School Leader's Observation Guide & Walk Around: Teacher Companion Tool can be found at: www.education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent/safeschools.aspx These tools are designed to assist in gathering information about the extent to which the school is a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment.

Process Guide for School Leaders:

www.resources.safeandcaring.ca/resource-safe/