

Date: April 23, 2025 **Agenda Item:** 7.5

To: Board of Trustees

From: Shawna Warren, Superintendent

Originator(s): Policy Committee
Shawna Warren, Superintendent

Subject: **Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction**

Recommended Motion:

THAT the Board of Trustees rescind Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction to align with the Board's governance responsibilities and the principles of effective policy development.

Background:

The Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining a policy framework that is strategic, relevant and aligned with the Division's mission and legal obligations. Research demonstrates that student achievement and well-being are best supported when boards focus on governance policies that provide clear direction while delegating administrative matters to staff (Leithwood, 2013). Regular policy reviews are essential to ensure that policies remain relevant and effective. In line with this commitment, the Policy Committee has identified several policies for rescission, as they are either outdated, redundant or better addressed through administrative procedures.

Board Policy 225: Role of the Board establishes that the Board's core governance responsibilities include:

- Developing policies that guide the Division's mission, vision and improvement efforts.
- Ensuring that policies focus on accountability, equity and student success.
- Delegating operational details to the Superintendent and staff.

Furthermore, Section 33(1)(i) of the Education Act mandates that the Board has the responsibility to "ensure effective stewardship of the Board's resources". Streamlining policies by removing redundancies and transferring operational matters to administrative procedures supports this requirement.

Principles of Effective Policy Development:

As outlined in the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) *Module 7: Exercising Authentic Governance*, strong school boards develop and maintain policies that:

- Focus on student achievement and well-being.
- Provide clear direction without micromanaging administrative functions.
- Ensure compliance with legislation and government requirements.
- Engage stakeholders through open and accountable policy development.
- Enable effective decision-making and risk management.

- Align with evidence-based practices and board goals.

Review and Recommendation:

Administration conducted a thorough review of the policies, referring to the G-Tech Model, and reviewing other School Boards that use the G-Tech Model. The Policy Committee reviewed the policies that were grouped into an Omnibus Motion at the February 24, 2025, Policy Committee meeting and referred them to the March 19, 2025, Public Board meeting, where the Omnibus Motion was defeated. The policies were reviewed again at the April 16, 2025, Policy Committee meeting and the Policy Committee recommended that Policy 800 be removed from the Omnibus Motion and brought forward as an independent motion. The Policy Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees rescind Board Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction.

Board Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction

As outlined in the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) Module 7: Exercising Authentic Governance, strong school boards develop and maintain policies that “ensure compliance with legislation and government requirements”.

The contents of Policy 800 are clearly captured in the Education Act, specifically:

- Section 19: Alternative programs,
- Section 58: Religious and Patriotic Instruction and Exercises, and
- Section 58.1: Parental Notice Requirements

Governance Implications:

- **Clarity in Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Rescinding this policy reinforces the Board's role in setting strategic direction, with operational matters delegated to the Superintendent.

- **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:**

- Eliminating policies that duplicate statutory requirements ensures that the Board's governance work remains focused and compliant with the Education Act.

- **Efficiency and Accountability:**

- **Reducing unnecessary policy volume** allows the Board to focus on high-impact **governance work** that supports student success and system improvement.

- **Transparency and Public Confidence:**

- By focusing on **high-impact policies**, the Board ensures that its governance efforts remain **student-centered and publicly accountable**.

Conclusion:

Rescinding Policy 800 will streamline the Division’s policy framework, eliminate redundancies and enhance governance efficiency in alignment with legislative requirements and best practices. This action supports the Board’s commitment to high-quality, effective governance that best serves students, families and the broader community.

Status & Relationship to Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLOS):

This report aligns with the [SLOS](#) in the following way:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| COMPETENCY: | (3) Visionary Leadership |
| INDICATORS: | c. promoting in the school community a common understanding of and support for the school authority’s goals, priorities and strategic initiatives; and
d. ensuring that the vision expressed in the school authority’s education plan is responsive to the ongoing review of the school authority’s achievements, meets all requirements identified in provincial legislation and incorporates the school community’s perspectives. |
| COMPETENCY: | (6) School Authority Operations and Resources |
| INDICATORS: | a. providing direction on fiscal and resource management in accordance with all statutory, regulatory and school authority requirements;
c. delegating responsibility to staff, where appropriate, to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness; and
e. establishing data-informed strategic planning and decision-making processes that are responsive to changing contexts. |
| COMPETENCY: | (7) Supporting Effective Governance |
| INDICATORS: | d. ensuring that the board’s plans, resource allocations, strategies and procedures lead to the achievement of its goals and priorities;
f. supporting the board in the fulfilment of its governance functions in the fiduciary, strategic and generative realms; and
g. implementing board policies and supporting the regular review and evaluation of their impact. |

Governance Implications:**Education Act**

Alternative programs

19(1) In this section, “alternative program” means an education program offered by a board that

- (a) emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject-matter, or
- (b) uses a particular teaching philosophy,

(2) A board may offer an alternative program to a student whose parent requests it where, in the opinion of the board,

- (a) the board has sufficient resources and facilities to offer the alternative program, and
- (b) the alternative program is appropriate to meet the student's education needs.

Religious and patriotic instruction or exercises

58(1) A board may

- (a) prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students;
- (b) prescribe religious exercises for its students;
- (c) prescribe patriotic instruction to be offered to its students;
- (d) prescribe patriotic exercises for its students;
- (e) permit persons other than teachers to provide religious instruction or exercises to its students.

Notice to parent

58.1(1) A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

Board responsibilities

33(1) A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

- (i) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources,

[Board Procedures Regulation](#)

Policies and procedures

4 The board must

- (a) establish policies and procedures governing the conduct of meetings of the board and the administration and business of the board, and
- (b) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the established policies and procedures on a regular basis.

[Policy 225: Role of the Board](#)

Governance and Organization

26. Develop, approve and monitor the implementation of policies to guide the Division and the Board.

28. Monitor the development, revision and implementation of policy

Administration is prepared to respond to questions at the April 23, 2025, Public Board meeting.

Attachment(s):

1. Board Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction

800: Religious Education and Instruction - Recommend to Rescind

Captured in Legislation - Education Act Section 19 “Alternative Programs”, Section 58 “Religious and Patriotic Instruction or Exercises” including Section 58.1 Notice to Parent

History -

References for the Board: Administrative Procedures: AP 830, 825 AND 835

1.0 POLICY

The Board believes that our schools have a role in helping children develop emotionally, intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually.

The Board believes in religious tolerance, the acknowledgement of religious diversity, the maintenance of inclusive environments in its schools, and the provision of appropriate opportunities for students to give expression to their religious beliefs.

The Board believes that while many education activities may be perceived to include incidental or indirect reference to religion or religious themes, these may provide valuable learning and cultural opportunities for students, serve to acknowledge the religious diversity that exists among students, and provide students with opportunity to express their personal beliefs, when done in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner and does not involve indoctrination.

2.0 GUIDELINES

2.1 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada, and the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Board encourages the practice of providing opportunities for students to take part in religious instruction during the day and may prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students.

2.2 Offering religious instruction

2.2.1 The Principal shall annually:

2.2.1.1 Inquire of parents/guardians as to whether or not they wish to have their child(ren) participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.1.2 Facilitate receipt of written approval for students whose parents/guardians wish them to participate in any religious instruction course.

2.2.1.3 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada and the Alberta Human Rights Act:

2.2.1.3.1 Receive indication from any parents/ guardians who do not wish to have their child(ren) participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.1.3.2 Make provision to provide an alternate course of instruction for any student(s) whose parents/guardians do not wish them to participate in a religious instruction course.

2.2.2 Approval Process

2.2.2.1 Whenever parents/guardians request that religious instruction courses be made available at a school, the Principal shall advise the Superintendent, who will advise the Board of Trustees.

2.2.2.2 The Board of Trustees may, through the Superintendent, direct the Principal to determine the degree of parent/guardian interest around such request for religious instruction courses through surveys, meetings or any other appropriate means of gathering information, and establish a timeframe for such undertaking.

2.2.2.3 The Principal shall present information obtained, including the rationale for the request for religious instruction courses and the determined degree of parent/guardian interest in the request, to the Board and seek Board prescription of such courses.

2.2.2.4 The Board shall consider the rationale presented, including the tradition and culture of the school community, as well as the determined degree of parent/guardian interest and may prescribe the religious instruction courses to be included in the school's course offerings.

2.2.2.5 For schools where the Board prescribes religious instruction courses, the Principal shall typically present information regarding such courses as part of the school's instructional program plan for the coming school year. Such information shall include:

2.2.2.5.1 The grades or grade groupings for which religious instruction will be offered,

2.2.2.5.2 The scheduling, as per legislation, of instruction per week,

2.2.2.5.3 The process by which parents/guardians will indicate their approval or non-approval for their child(ren) to participate in a religious instruction course,

2.2.2.5.4 The course of instruction to be offered to any student whose parents/guardians indicate that their child is not to participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.2.5.5 If any persons other than teachers are to provide the religious instruction to the students.

2.3 Alternative Programs

In accordance with The Education Act the Board may establish an alternative program that emphasizes religion and includes:

2.3.1 Courses of study

2.3.2 Instructional materials, and

2.3.3 Instruction or exercises that deal primarily and explicitly with religion.

2.4 Participation in Activities

2.4.1 The Board authorizes student participation in the following activities which may include incidental or indirect reference to religion or religious themes:

2.4.1.1 A moment of silence at a special event such as a Remembrance Day ceremony,

2.4.1.2 Appropriate and inclusive ceremonial prayer at special events such as graduation exercises,

2.4.1.3 Participation in extra-curricular activities such as religious clubs,

2.4.1.4 Preparation for, and performance of, musical or dramatic selections with incidental religious themes or content, with the understanding that such selections shall not contain religious exercises such as prayers or bible readings and where the preparation and performance of those selections takes place in an inclusive, nondiscriminatory manner and do not involve indoctrination.

2.4.1.5 Concerts and activities in recognition of holidays with a religious basis, where such concerts and activities do not contain religious exercises such as prayers or bible readings and the concert or activity takes place in an inclusive, non-discriminatory manner and do not involve indoctrination.

2.4.1.6 Activities of a religious nature associated with the study of other cultures, and activities as part of provincially authorized courses of study such as Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meanings 20, and World Religions 30 where sufficient student interest warrants the offering of such courses.

2.4.2 Parent Notification and Exemption Provisions

2.4.2.1 In accordance with the Education Act, parents/guardians shall be provided notice where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion.

2.4.2.2 Exemptions from Participation Principals shall ensure that:

2.4.2.2.1 Provision is made to accommodate the wishes of parents/guardians who make written request that their child(ren) be exempted from participating in activities dealing primarily and explicitly with religious theme or content,

2.4.2.2.2 An appropriate alternate activity is provided for nonparticipants

2.4.2.2.3 Depending on the parent request, the students are permitted to leave the classroom or place where the activity is taking place for the duration of the activity that includes the primary and explicit religious theme or content, or the students are permitted to remain in the classroom or place of activity without taking part in the activity, and

2.4.2.2.4 Non-participants are treated discreetly and with respect at all times.

2.5 Wearing Faith-Based Symbols

Students may wear faith-based jewelry, objects or articles of clothing at school or during school sponsored activities, as long as these are worn discreetly, do not have a proselytizing message, and meet the requirements of the school's standards of dress and grooming.

References:

Education Act: Sections 16, 61, 58 (1) (a) (b), and 58.1

Alberta Act, 1905: Section 17

School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, 1901: Sections 137 and 138

Constitution Act, 1867: Section 93

Alberta Human Rights Act Preamble

History

2019 Mar 27 Initial Approval

2019 Oct 23 Reviewed

2020 Jan 29 Amended

2021 Oct 27 Reviewed