

INCLUSIVE CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES PROVIDING SAFE AND CARING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Background

The mission of the Division speaks to students and staff being provided every opportunity to experience success in a Catholic community guided by Christ. As further outlined in Board Policy 1, every effort to realize this mission is guided by beliefs and values that place the well-being of students 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 are “gifts from God”. For this reason, the Division will ensure that each student enrolled in our schools is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful, safe and Catholic environment that promotes the well-being of all students 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.

The Division’s goal is to develop responsible, caring and respectful members of a just, peaceful and democratic society. School staff, under the direction of the Principal, are to maintain order and discipline in the school, on school grounds and during Division-sponsored activities. School staff must operate in a loco parentis role whereby they act in relation to students as responsible caring parents. As well, in exercising their authority under the School Act, staff must always consider the best educational interests and fundamental rights of all students.

Appendix A and B provides guidelines and the School Act sets the legal expectations for our responsibility to our students and the community.

Definitions

Bullying is hereby defined to respond to the Board’s responsibility to Section 45(8) of the *School Act*, which stipulates that it must provide a safe and caring environment for all students. Bullying means repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by a student where the behaviour is intended by the student 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. Parameters for addressing bullying are outlined within this procedure.

Cyber-Bullying refers to any harassment that occurs via the internet, cell phones, or other devices. Communication technology is used to intentionally harm others through hostile behavior such as sending text messages and posting ugly comments on the internet. The National Crime Prevention Council defines cyber-bullying as “the process of using the Internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.” Cyber-bullying could be limited to posting rumors or gossips about a person in the internet bringing about hatred in other’s minds; or it may go to the extent of personally identifying victims and publishing materials severely defaming and humiliating to them.

Intimate Images is defined by the Criminal Code of Canada as being one in which the subject is nude, partially nude, or engaged in explicit sexual activity. In cases where the intimate image depicts a person under the age of 18 the image could constitute child pornography and could be considered a criminal offence. The distribution of intimate images without the consent of the individual could also lead to a criminal offence.

Hazing Subtle hazing acts include ridicule, humiliating, embarrassment or ostracizing a student. Harassment-hazing acts include verbal abuse, wearing ridiculous clothing, committing lewd or crude acts or answering questions while in a sexual stance with another student. Bodily harm-hazing includes physical punishment, inappropriate touching and taking a student's clothing off.

Conflict in Relationship occurs through single episodic acts of breakdowns in relationship between students. Conflict is an inevitable component of students learning to grow within social relationships. Disagreement and misunderstanding between parties is at the heart of conflict. However, conflict does not constitute premeditated efforts to cause harm, fear, or distress.

Harassment occurs when an employee, student or volunteer is subjected to unwelcome verbal or physical conduct because of race, religious beliefs, color, place of origin, gender, mental or physical disability, ancestry, marital status, family status, source of income or sexual orientation. Harassment can include, but is not limited to, such things as verbal or physical abuse, refusing to converse or work with an employee or student because of his or her racial or ethnic background, displaying racist, derogatory or offensive pictures or materials, unwelcome remarks, jokes, gestures, innuendo or taunts about an individual's age, national or ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, sources of income or family status.

Sexual Harassment is discrimination on the grounds of gender and includes unwanted sexual advances, unwanted requests for sexual favors, and other unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term of, or condition of, an individual's employment or submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual that affects the individual's employment.

Sexual Harassment can include, but is not limited to, such things as pinching, patting, rubbing or leering, "dirty" jokes, display of pictures, or pornographic materials, comments, suggestions, innuendoes, requests or demands of a sexual nature. The behavior need not be intentional in order to be considered sexual harassment; it is sufficient that the offender knows, or ought to reasonably know, that the behavior is offensive and unwelcome.

Restorative Discipline adds to the current discipline framework of schools. It promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches between students, home, church and school for being in community. These approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed. These approaches allow schools to act and respond in ways that are healing, rather than alienating or coercive. Restorative discipline is a strategy that a Principal may use to address bullying within a school.

Supporting Positive Behaviours is a strategy for schools to further the social responsibility and responsiveness of students in meeting behavioural expectations in a school. Within this model, pre-determined levels of support and intervention are established to enhance a positive climate of school engagement for all students. While the support model may look different at each school, three levels may be clearly identified:

- Basic/Universal Support:

Systemic teaching that produces a clear understanding of expectations is developed in a collaborative and respectful culture.

- Targeted Support:

Additional support is provided for those students who have not yet internalized appropriate responses to the expectations that they have been expected to follow.

- Individual/Intensive Support:

Highly focused support is established for those students who require ongoing adult monitoring in order to engage in appropriate behaviours.

Supporting Positive Behaviors is based upon a belief that teaching and nourishing appropriate behaviours has a far greater success than relying upon a model of consequences and punishment. This model is applied according to the age and stage of development of the learner and is a strategy that a Principal may also use to address bullying within a school.

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 within our schools.

Respect for the Human Person – Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of mankind. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to man and woman. What is always at stake is the dignity of the human person, “whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.”

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” (Galations 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.

Chastity – Our definition of chastity is rooted in God’s plan for us as human persons created in His image and likeness. Our bodies are, as St. Paul writes, “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), designed to reflect God’s love to the world. Gifted with our sexuality, we are called to express it with dignity and reverence and with purity of both body and mind. The challenge for each of us, young and old, is to control our desires and passions, to live our sexuality as the Father wills and in a way that honors God, ourselves, and others. To do so is to be chaste. For unmarried persons, “chastity entails abstinence [from sexual relations], because God’s design

is that sex belongs in marriage.” Our sexuality is to be self-giving in nature, and the sexual act is to be unitive and procreative and exclusive to marriage.

The Alberta Bishops’ “A Resource for an Inclusive Community (2001)” remains an instructive pastoral resource for teachers and counselors in our ministry to students experiencing same-sex attractions. The Canadian Catholic Bishops’ *Pastoral Letter to Young People on Chastity* summarizes the importance of this resource by stating: “Persons who experience attraction to those of the same sex are also called to chastity. They too can grow in Christian holiness through a life of self-control, prayer, and the reception of the sacraments.”

Procedures

1. Students and staff are expected to model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviors so that teaching and learning can take place in a safe and caring environment.
2. When exercising their authority, the Division will ensure that the best educational interests of the student are paramount.
3. All actions by students that impact the safety and well-being of students or staff or call into question a student’s success in being accountable for his/her conduct to the successful operation of the school will be addressed through Administrative Procedure 350 – Student Conduct and Discipline.
4. All Principals, in consultation with staff, must enact procedures that support the following expectations with respect to bullying.
 - 4.1 No action toward another student, regardless of the intent of that action, will cause harm, fear, or distress to that student.
 - 4.2 No action toward another student within the school community will diminish the student’s reputation within the school community.
 - 4.3 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 Principal or designate if it is determined that the actions impact the well-being of the alleged victim within the school community.
 - 4.4 Any action that humiliates or contributes to diminishing the reputation of a student because of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, ancestry, place of origin, marital status of parents, source of income of parents, family circumstances, or sexual orientation of a student is deemed to be an act of bullying.
 - 4.5 No report by a student that is being “bullied” will be ignored by a staff member. The staff member will respond as if an incident has happened and report the incident to a teacher or Principal.
 - 4.6 The Principal will distinguish between those matters of bullying that will be addressed by teachers, and those to be addressed by the Principal.
 - 4.7 Students who are bystanders to an act of bullying have a responsibility to report observed incidences to school staff. Students are expected to either exercise

communication dedicated to prevent bullying behaviour or, failing this, immediately report such incidences to school staff.

- 4.8 Students do not have a role in disciplining other students who have allegedly participated in bullying behaviour. They are encouraged to discourage these actions by labeling the behaviour through communication to others as bullying, requesting that the behaviour cease, and report the incident to a staff member.
 - 4.9 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.
 - 4.10 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 educating the student victimized about how to address the issue in the future. 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.
 - 4.11 Parents/Guardians play a primary role in assisting with the resolution of matters pertaining to bullying. Apprising them of issues in this area as they have impacted their children should occur at the earliest opportunity.
 - 4.12 A Principal may use a Restorative Discipline or Positive Behavioural Support model to address matters of discipline.
 - 4.13 Incidents of bullying that adversely impact the safety of individuals or compromises the common good of the school community may be addressed through application of Sections 24 Suspension or 25 Expulsion of the *School Act*.
5. Procedures used by schools to address bullying will be placed in the School’s Code of Conduct, reviewed with School Councils, and evaluated for effectiveness annually.
 6. Principals and teachers must rely on Central Supports if existing resources or strategies are insufficient in addressing bullying within the school community.
 7. In order to enhance an overall approach to supporting safe and caring learning environments for students, Principals may establish upon request an Inclusive Catholic Community Group that promotes respect for the human person as per guidelines provided in the *LIFE Framework* “Appendix A and/or “*A Resource for a Pastoral Approach to Supporting and Guiding Students in Inclusive Communities, Gender Identity and Expression*” Appendix B. When students, out of concern for each other within the school or within the greater or global communities, seek to initiate this request, the following expectations will be followed.
 - 7.1 A proposal must be presented to the Principal.
 - 7.2 The Principal, in consultation with Central Supports, will approve or amend the request based upon its capacity to uphold the sanctity of human life through acts of justice/social action while upholding Catholic teaching on social relationships.
 - 7.3 The Principal must establish the supervisory and educational authority of the activity through the designation of a staff advisor who will monitor and support the student group.

- 7.4 The Principal must clarify the objectives of the group with the staff advisor before meeting with students.
- 7.5 The Principal must ensure in-service for staff advisors regarding the purpose for the student group and how the group can be supported.
- 7.6 The Principal must approve materials and resources used within the student group.
- 7.7 The Principal will regularly supervise and ensure the intent of FOIP legislation within the province is followed.
- 7.8 The staff advisor must be present for all meetings from beginning to end and use the mission, vision, and core values of the Division, Catholic teaching on social relationships, and the Church's definition of chastity 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.
- 7.9 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 will result in individual participation within the group being restricted, or the dissolving of the group itself.

8. The Division will fulfill all legal obligations under Section 16.1 of the *School Act*.

Legal References:

School Act
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom
Alberta Human Rights Act
Individual Rights Protection Act
Catechism of the Catholic Church
Supporting Safe, Secure and Caring Schools in Alberta (1999)
Administrative Procedure 350 Student Conduct and Discipline

CCSSA’s LIFE Framework

“Lived Inclusion For Everyone”

Background

Catholic Schools share a foundational belief that all children are loved by God, are individually unique and that the school has a mission to help each student to fulfill their God-given potential in all aspects of their person: physically, academically, socially, morally and spiritually.

Specific background resources for LIFE Framework: Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association (ACSTA) *Safe and Caring Learning Environments for Students*, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA) *Commitment to Inclusive Communities*, and Calgary Catholic School District’s (CSSD) *Supporting Inclusive Communities*.

Commitment to the LIFE Framework

Catholic Schools are committed to using the LIFE Framework as a guideline for the creation and operation of student groups that are comprehensive in their approach to inclusion and open to the exploration in a Catholic context of a variety of issues including bullying, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity, discrimination, justice, and respectful relationships and language.

Naming of LIFE Framework student groups

Names for student groups seeking to further respect the human person will be approved by the principal, in consultation with the chief superintendent, will incorporate language in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church, and will respect the intent of this document.

Who might be served by LIFE Framework student groups?

- All students

Guidelines for the Formation of student groups

Because some students, especially those with same sex attractions, and those who identify with different genders, as well as those who experience discrimination or isolation based on body image, race, culture, language, performance in school, social anxiety/lack of social connection, or other individual attributes, may be at-risk, it is advised that every school be well prepared to establish student groups to address these needs. Such groups should be formed when there is a student request.

When students wish to form a group, it is important to determine the nature of the request and how best to meet the expressed needs. ‘What are you looking for?’ Through conversations with students, the purpose for the group needs to be identified, so it can be properly structured within the guidelines. Flexibility and responsiveness, based on needs, is critical. Student groups may be formed for the following purposes:

- Advocacy
- Peer support
- Counselling

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In each type of group, issues that result in discrimination and bullying may be addressed, including, but not limited to:

- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Gender
- Body image
- Race, culture or language
- Performance in school
- Social rejection, peer acceptance

General norms also govern all types of student groups. Groups shall:

- Support the mission, vision and core values of the school and the school jurisdiction while upholding the sanctity of human life through discussions, acts of justice, and social action within the context of Catholic teaching on social relationships.
- Reflect through name and action the philosophy and theology of communion and emphasize inclusion, hospitality, respect and justice.

Since each type of group addresses different needs (advocacy, peer support, counselling), specific guidelines and additional norms follow:

Advocacy Groups

Purpose

- To advocate against all forms of discrimination and/or behaviours that cause students to feel isolated and not included.
- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via initiatives designed to advocate against all forms of discrimination.
- To enable students to feel empowered to activate their unique God-given gifts for the benefit of furthering a more just community for everyone.
- To discuss issues that cause pervasive harm to young people in society.

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and assisted, when possible, by counselors, chaplains or social workers.
- Be open from a Catholic perspective to exploration of a variety of issues, including sexual orientation, gender identity, bullying, discrimination, justice, and respectful relationships and language.
- Ensure advocacy efforts are directed against all forms of bullying and discrimination.

Activities

- Exploring how inclusive practices enhance the life of the school (e.g. celebrating a school's success annually through a variety of means).

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- Sponsoring activities throughout the school year to address these areas (i.e. bullying awareness week activities, peer advocacy, guest speakers, and frequent liaison with the school principal).
- Promoting whole school social justice activities to address needs locally, nationally or internationally.

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Peer Support Groups

Purpose

- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via facilitated discussions.

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and assisted, when possible, by counselors, chaplains or social workers.
- Ensure boundaries prior to the discussion of any topic, so members do not feel pressured to make personal disclosures.
- Invite, but not pressure, other students to join them.
- Be sensitive to the safety of all students who are at risk.
- Refrain from labeling or discussing students who are not members.
- Consider inviting students to develop additional norms and procedures with the facilitator carefully guiding this process.

Activities

- Exploring those areas with staff facilitators where inclusion could be improved (e.g. student group discussions as per "norms" outlined through the leadership of the facilitator).

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Counselling Groups

Purpose

- To assemble students who experience discrimination, isolation, and a lack of feeling included in their school community or society with students who want to offer these students their support via facilitated discussions.

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- To support students experiencing a variety of challenges related to feelings of belonging, self-worth, identity, friendship, etc.
- To support students who may be marginalized as a result of bullying or social exclusion based on gender, sexual orientation, culture, size, physical or academic ability, etc.
- To support students in understanding their sexual identities who may be experiencing a variety of challenges related to their sexuality (e.g. how to talk to parents, friends, etc.).

Norms

- Ensure the student groups are led by trained Catholic facilitators and counsellors, and assisted as needed by psychologists, chaplains or social workers.
- If a student discloses information to a staff member regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity, it is important to remember that they have a right to confidentiality unless student well-being is at risk.
- Ensure all normal processes for group counselling are followed.
- Be sensitive to the safety of all students who are at risk.
- Refrain from labeling or discussing students who are not members.

Activities

- Utilize counselling strategies to address group needs.

Activity Exemplars

- Schools and school boards participating in the LIFE Framework are invited to submit one page descriptions of successful activities to the Executive Director of the CCSSA for inclusion in this document's appendix.

Facilitation of Student Groups:

- As faith guides, strengthening every aspect of Catholic education, facilitators integrate prayer, scripture, and Catholic teaching (e.g. 'the dignity of the human person' and 'a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable') into their discussions as appropriate. The groups will be permeated in a manner consistent with all Catholic school programming.
- Student groups shall be facilitated by a Catholic teacher and approved by the principal.
- The principal shall ensure the facilitator(s) receives in-service or information on both relevant Catholic teachings and the facilitation of group discussion.
- At the principal's discretion, if the school has a counsellor, social worker, Family School Liaison Worker (FSLW), chaplain or a staff member with a similar designation, that staff member should co-facilitate.
- The facilitator(s) shall attend every meeting.

Informing parents about LIFE Framework student groups:

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The Alberta Bill of Rights, s.1 (g) recognizes that parents have both the right to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. The second paragraph of the preamble to the School Act and paragraph eight of the preamble of the Education Act (upon proclamation), recognizes parent's rights and responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children.

The following two step process is recommended to advise parents regarding the formation of LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs:

Step 1 – A general notice is provided to the school community (recommended inclusion in annual student handbook) that students may be organizing LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs at the school in the future.

Step 2 – If a LIFE Framework/Diversity club is formed in a school, notification of the formation of the club is sent to all parents (not naming of any students involved in the formation of the clubs). This notification includes the responsibility of parents to discuss with their child the purpose and nature of the club, whether their child wishes to become a member and their child's obligation to both refrain from bullying behavior and contribute to a safe learning school environment that respects diversity. At all times parents are invited to converse with the school regarding the intention of the LIFE Framework/Diversity Club.

Section 16.1 of the School Act or Section 35.1 of the Education Act whichever is in force:

Support for student organizations

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) 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.

(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, including the name "gay-straight alliance" or "queerstraight 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

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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.

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A Resource for a Pastoral Approach to Supporting and Guiding Students in Inclusive Communities – Gender Identity and Expression

Purpose:

Our Catholic schools are committed to supporting inclusive communities that teach care and compassion for every person, regardless of age, race, sex, gender or sexual orientation, and require that every person be treated with dignity and respect. ¹This document provides background information about Catholic teachings, and considerations for schools, when supporting and guiding students with respect to gender identity and expression.

Background:

Catholic schools are places of both learning and believing. Our schools share a foundational belief that all children are loved by God, created in God's image, and individually unique. The school has a mission to help students grow as children of God in all aspects of their person: physically, academically, socially, morally and spiritually.

The Catholic Church teaches that the body and soul are so united that one's gender identity is rooted in one's biological identity as male and female. In Catholic teaching, one's sexual identity is considered "a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman". ²It is the conviction of the Catholic Church that genetically, anatomically and chromosomally, the body reveals the divine plan, and that humans are "obliged to regard [their bodies] as good and to hold [them] in honour since God has created [them]". ³Therefore, to attempt 'gender transitioning' is contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In our schools, students at all grade levels may need support and guidance with respect to gender identity and expression. Instances of attempted gender transitioning may be presented at all levels in elementary and secondary schools. Any educator approached with a request for accommodation must respond with sensitivity, respect, mercy, and compassion.

Gender identity issues are complex, delicate and highly personal. There are a range of emotional and behavioural manifestations around gender expression. Individuals may experience gender-questioning; that is, persons "may be questioning or exploring their gender identity, and their gender identity may not align with their sex assigned at birth".⁴ Some may also exhibit gender non-conforming behaviours, which is "an umbrella term to describe people whose gender expression or gender identity differs from gender norms associated with their assigned birth sex".⁵

¹[The Joy of the Gospel](#), nos.110-114

²[Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World \(2004\)](#), n.8.

³[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#): specifically, no. 364, 365, 2332, 2333, 2393;

⁴[Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People](#), American Psychological Association, 2015

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54

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Importantly, while there is individual variation, this is an “at-risk” group in need of special care and attention. In some cases, persons who experience significant amounts of distress related to their gender identity or challenges with social, school or other important areas of functioning, may need more intensive support.⁶ In addition, students who identify as transgender often experience higher levels of: bullying ... physical violence, sexual abuse, drugs/alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted infections, depression, anxiety and suicidal attempts than their peers.⁷ Therefore these students may engage in various coping mechanisms and defensive strategies, including acting out or withdrawal behaviours.

Students’ understanding of their own gender identity and expression evolves over time, and may not remain consistent throughout the years. The majority of children that gender-question or exhibit gender non-conforming behaviours will not attempt to gender transition in their adolescence or adulthood.⁸ Therefore, the level of ongoing support and guidance required will vary, depending on individual need.

Considerations for Superintendents and Districts—Operational Procedures:

Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments:

In a Catholic context, and in keeping with the teachings of the Church, school administration and staff have the responsibility to ensure a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging in all aspects of school life. All students benefit from knowing there are safe and caring adult advocates in their school and parish. The learning environment supports what is best for individuals, and at the same time, the needs of the community as a whole.

In addition, for the benefit of the individual and family, schools protect the privacy and confidentiality of students, including information about gender identity and expression. Ideally, school environments are designed to support inclusivity, allowing for full participation of all members without disclosure of personal information.

A Collaborative Approach:

Aligned with best practice, schools develop plans for individual students based on their needs. It is important to determine needs through a collaborative team approach, engaging the student, family, staff, and other professionals in the discussion and planning as appropriate.

⁶ [Diagnostic & Statistical Manual-5 \(DSM-5\)](#), American Psychiatric Association

⁷ [Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools: A Guide for Educators](#) – Canadian Teachers Federation

⁸ Ibid

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The following considerations reflect these understandings:

- **Athletics**

Athletic eligibility for all students participating in school sports is determined by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association (ASAA) and/or local division athletic associations. Eligibility at secondary level reflects criteria of these associations to ensure consistency and alignment. For intramurals, the principal will determine best practice and rationale for all individuals involved. Based on specific student circumstances, educators address additional needs in consultation with the principal and district leadership.

- **Course Selection**

Schools may choose to offer gender specific courses (e.g. physical education). The principal will determine the best practice and rationale for all individuals involved.

- **Dress Code/Uniforms**

Most schools and divisions maintain dress codes that provide students with positive guidelines for appropriate dress in an educational setting and the context of a Catholic school environment. These dress codes should be flexible enough, and worded such, that all people feel comfortable in school environments. For those schools that incorporate school uniforms consideration of all students must be kept in mind in the design and choice of the uniforms.

- **Names**

While schools are required to use legal names on all legal documents, common names may be used at the request of parents on a day-to-day basis. If parents provide legal documentation to support a name or gender change, school legal documents are amended. Families initiate this process and present such information, if they choose to do so.

- **Overnight Field Trips**

Overnight field trips are planned to accommodate individual needs, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of students, and allowing students to participate without the requirement to disclose personal information. The principal, in consultation with the student and family, determines the best practice and rationale for all individuals involved.

- **Washroom/Change Room Accessibility**

Each school is encouraged to designate gender neutral single stall washrooms available for all students as a washroom and change room. This supports students with their gender identity and expression, body image concerns, or request for additional privacy for any reason.

Vision Statement

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Resources:

[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#): specifically, no. 364, 365, 2332, 2333, 2393;

[Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World \(2004\)](#), n.8.

[FAQ on Gender Identity Disorder and “Sex Change” Operations](#)-- National Catholic Bioethics Centre

[Lived Inclusion for Everyone \(LIFE\) Framework](#) -- Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta

[Joy of the Gospel](#), nos. 110-114

[Alberta Human Rights Act](#) (Section 1)

[Alberta School Act June 1, 2015](#) (Sections 16.1, 43.1, 45.1)

[Diagnostic & Statistical Manual-5 \(DSM-5\)](#), American Psychiatric Association

[Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People](#), American Psychological Association, 2015

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#)—Questions and Answers: Gender Identity in Schools

[Safe and Caring Schools for Transgender Students](#)--Alberta Teachers Association

[Supporting Every Student: Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments](#)

[Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools: A Guide for Educators](#)--Canadian Teachers Federation

[Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments: Information for School Staff \(Alberta’s Amended School Act\)](#)

November 9, 2015

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