

Diversity Education Policy Development Tool Kit



Developed by:

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities

in partnership with



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Foreword

It is our vision that schools and communities will be safe, caring and inclusive environments where each child will learn to be a respectful and responsible citizen. One important aspect of this is to build respect for diversity—to increase understanding of and respect for visible and behavioural differences, including those relating to diverse customs, traditions, beliefs, or physical appearance. By encouraging respectful attitudes and behaviours among young people, a school can prevent racism, discrimination, harassment, bullying and other kinds of aggression—the result being a safe and caring learning environment for all.



To accomplish this, administrators and school staff must be empowered to address issues relating to diversity, and take advantage of valuable opportunities to encourage positive social behaviours in students and school staff. One of the most powerful tools to assist this process is to have a strong educational policy in place that outlines behaviours to encourage respect for diversity, and processes for addressing incidents in an effective and respectful way.

It is our hope that this resource will guide policy makers, advocates and educational leaders, both at the school and school board levels, through the challenge of setting education policy for dealing with diversity issues.

Background

In 2006, The Society for Safe and Caring Schools (SACSC), with the financial support of Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism Program and the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund, undertook a project that would support our country's democratic ideals in public schools by creating a research-based Diversity Education Policy Development Tool Kit. The purpose was to develop a toolkit which would outline strategies for educational leaders to use when developing educational policies that help schools sensitively and effectively address diversity issues, and act as a guideline for creating safe, caring and inclusive school environments.

The resulting resource is based on research as well as extensive consultation with: multicultural/parent community groups, school administrators, school trustees from various Alberta school boards, and a Steering Committee composed of a cross-section of education partners as well as representatives from the Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education, the Alberta Home and School Councils Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Edmonton Public School Board, Northern Alberta Alliance Against Race Relations, Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, Suddards Consulting Inc. and United Nations of Canada Edmonton Branch. A special thank you to Calgary Public Schools and Edmonton Public Schools policy staff for sharing information on policy development.

Through this research the Society uncovered that a significant barrier encountered by schools when responding to ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity is this—many teachers and administrators in Alberta schools do not feel comfortable addressing many types of diversity issues for fear of disapproval from parents and community. Since some schools/school boards do not have policies that empower the administration and staff to implement this kind of programming, little headway is made, and the issues escalate or at best, remain the same. With this resource, we hope to assist schools and school boards in revising or developing new education policies and/or administration regulations which encourage them to implement programs (curricular and extra-curricular) and practices that increase the appreciation for cultural diversity. This toolkit will also encourage community involvement when developing education policies on diversity.

Even schools that have not yet experienced incidents relating to diversity can prepare themselves by establishing policy for diversity before problems arise.

Overview

It is not the intent of the Diversity Education Policy Development Tool Kit to interpret any legislation pertaining to the School Act, the Charter of Rights and any other current legislation that pertains to policy development. This Tool Kit is intended as a guide; as a starting point when developing policy and/or regulations or as a reference document when analyzing existing policy/regulations.

Policy prerequisites

This education policy development tool kit is based on two prerequisites:

- The policy maker(s) adopt a world view.
- Policy is dynamic; it changes over time to reflect the “current reality”.

Policy, in a democratic environment, involves two more prerequisites:

- Policy development must be open to public initiative.
- Development of policy requires a commitment to exploring issues and acting in ways intended to be:
 - principled and honest,

The Changing Population in Alberta Schools

The Government of Alberta report (1995–2008) describes the following trends and issues:

- Alberta is the fourth largest immigrant-receiving province. Most of Alberta’s immigrants come from China, the Philippines, India, Korea and Pakistan.
- The population of Aboriginal people is growing much faster than the non-Aboriginal population. According to the latest information, about 156,000 people in Alberta identified themselves as Aboriginal and of that population, over 52,000 are school-aged First Nations children.
- Diversity will be the hallmark of Alberta classrooms as schools welcome increasing numbers of children from other countries, traditions, languages and cultures.
- Schools will continue to struggle to meet their students’ diverse needs.
- The rich diversity of children means that there will be increasing challenges to welcome these students and help newcomers adapt to their new school and community.
- Schools will continue to be expected to instil positive values in students and to prepare them to be active, lifelong learners and contributing members of society.

(Source: *A Changing Population*
Alberta Education Website
Retrieved April 21, 2008)

- relevant and effective,
- equitable,
- transparent and accountable, and
- economic and efficient.

At the same time, policy alone is insufficient as it must be accompanied by a clear agenda for action that establishes what will be done to bring about equity, improved interpersonal relations, and greater inter-group harmony.

(Source: Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, 2007)

The following criteria, therefore, may need to be considered by education policy makers regarding implementation through administrative regulation/procedure development and review:

- Administrative regulations must be in accordance with the School Act and the Board of Trustees' Governance policies.
- Administrative regulations must be necessary for maintaining and/or enhancing public education.
- Administrative regulations are focused on assisting teachers, principals, and other administrators in their efforts to support student learning.
- There must be no overlap or duplication among the administrative regulations.

(Source: Calgary Board of Education, 2007)

Contents of the Tool Kit

- A model to develop policy
- Sample survey questions
- Templates that outline steps for various procedures including education policy development, implementation, evaluation including monitoring and annual reviews
- Samples of relevant diversity policies
- Examples of philosophical and value statements
- Executive Summary – Literature Review and Policy Scan

Models and samples provided in this document can be used to guide the development of similarly aligned policies which can be adapted to meet the needs of specific communities.

Cultural Misunderstandings

In an Alberta dual-track school that had both the Hebrew and regular programs, the Jewish parents came to the school board and asked if they could have a fence built on the playground to separate the Jewish children from the non-Jewish children. The concern was that the non-Jewish students were making fun of the way the Jewish students dressed. The parents eventually established a private school so that their children would be separate from the others. This is an example of what can happen when intercultural tension and misunderstandings are not resolved in a way that supports diversity. In this case, the outcome led to more segregation and reinforces intolerance for different beliefs and customs.

Inclusion versus Exclusion

One school district in British Columbia made a decision to recall all the calendars they had sent out to every student and staff member because of a complaint that only Christian celebrations were included in the calendar. All religious holidays in the calendars were removed and the calendars were reprinted. The school district had an opportunity to foster a greater understanding of different cultures by encouraging students to share the significance of their traditions with other students. They could have included *all* special celebrations of the different students' cultures in the school calendar rather than removing the holidays that had originally been acknowledged.

Terminology

Although there are numerous definitions for the following terms, in order to have a common understanding of information appearing in the Policy Development Kit, the following definitions are used here.

- **Caring:** The concept of caring in a multicultural context is a concern for each child as a student and as a person; confidence in the ability of each one to learn and to perform at high levels; and a commitment on the part of teachers to ensure that each child learns.
- **Culture:** a framework for behaviour that includes not only ethnic racial distinctions but other forms of social variety that have been targeted with prejudice, discrimination or marginalization. This definition places behavioural norms, patterns of interaction and ways of thinking and learning alongside more traditional cultural interests such as food, dress, dance and music.
- **Discrimination:** The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines discrimination as “an act, instance, policy, etc. of unfavourable treatment based on prejudice, especially regarding race, age or sex.”
- **Gender Identity:** A person’s internal sense of being male or female. Gender expression relates to how a person presents is or her sense of gender to society. Gender identity and gender expression are often closely linked with terms *transgender* and *trans-identified*.
- **Multiculturalism:** The notion of multiculturalism (from the Trudeau legacy) in Canada stems from the acknowledgement of diversity as a key element of the Canadian identity and led to redefinition of the common good as the development of a climate that would encourage social integration, while acknowledging difference, and facilitate a recommendation of French and Aboriginal issues within the Canadian federal state...rooted in the liberal ideal of equalitarianism by encouraging cultural retention and integration within a framework of individual choice and the existence of a welfare state (under Multiculturalism as an Articulating Principle: Historical Background).
- **Policy:** Policy is a reliable guide to consistent and understandable action (or inaction). Policy is not a statement of purpose, or a mission statement, or a goal statement. A Mandate statement might be a policy statement. Policy is meant to embody beliefs and channel energy and activity so as to achieve goals.
(Public School Boards Association of Alberta, 2007)

Cultural Competency

A 2004 study in the Edmonton public and separate school systems indicated that parents felt that the teachers lack cultural knowledge and do not understand non-mainstream cultures. This study also indicated a common perspective among parents and students that cultural understanding is central to creating an equitable learning environment. For example, mainstream values of assertiveness, competition, and academic achievement conflict with many other cultures that value quiet, listening, cooperation, and building self-esteem.

(Source: Equity in Edmonton Schools. Report for the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations)

Learning Positive Social Behaviours

When episodes of discrimination or cultural disrespect in schools are punished without addressing the lack of understanding that is at the root of the behaviour, students do not learn about more appropriate ways to behave, nor are they encouraged to have respect for diversity. Instead, they are likely to grow more disdain for other cultural groups as the image of “us” versus “them” is strengthened.

- **Regulation/procedure:** Administrative guidelines that help to put into operation the principles established in a policy.
- **Policy Development Tool Kit:** This is a resource that school boards and administrators could use to structure policies that specifically outline how schools can sensitively and effectively address intercultural and diversity issues such as racism and discrimination.
- **Prejudice:** The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines prejudice as a “preconceived opinion; bias or partiality; dislike or distrust of a person, group or judgment.”
- **Race:** For this project, the term race refers to people of color, or those with visible skin color differences. Given the absence of a biological basis for racial distinctiveness, race is primarily socially or culturally defined and may be illogical and inconsistent.
- **Racism:** There are 2 aspects to consider – it is people holding individual attitudes and values that bring about the structural racism of institutions, often without awareness and despite their best intentions.
- **Regulation/procedure:** Administrative regulations help to put into operation the principles established in a policy.
- **Societal equity:** Building an inclusive environment that promotes a greater sense of respect and harmony among students, school staff and the greater community.

References:

- Alberta School Boards Association
- Literature and Policy Review (Appendix G)*
- SACSC “*Creating Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools for LGBTQ Students*”

NOTE: It is important to identify common definitions of terms in order to establish an understanding among all of the partners.

Using the Tool Kit

Who could benefit from using this Tool Kit?

- **YOU** will find this Kit information useful if you are an Alberta school trustee/school board member, administrator or education representative who is responsible for developing and/or advocating for educational policies.

How could you use this Tool Kit?

- **YOU** could select from the collection of “tools”, based on your familiarity with policy process and personal discretion, after reading the preliminary information and literature review.

One example is a series of checklists that identify each step from development to implementation.

When could you use this Tool Kit?

- **YOU** could use this document to provide regular guidance when education related diversity policies are to be considered/drafted/written/presented to partners and revised/re-written.

What does a Diversity Educational Policy Need?

- To be specific about the values that are promoted and respected for the school or jurisdiction
- Community engagement and consultation
- To empower and support those who champion the removal of systemic and structural barriers
- To be accompanied by decisive actions that will eliminate specific inequities

(Source: Building Intercultural Respect through Policy Development: Literature and Policy Review)

Education

Anti-racist education tends to focus on race (color) as a salient difference and the structures that sustain the power of a dominant group over a minority “other”. A more inclusive stance, taking into account other social and behavioural differences such as disability, gender and sexual orientation, is sometimes characterized as anti-oppressive rather than anti-racist.

(Source: Building Intercultural Respect through Policy Development: Literature and Policy Review)

Congratulations on taking the first step!

A Model for Developing Education Policies

Selecting the Model

After extensive reviews of literature and current Alberta school board practices, the Society has selected a model for developing education policies that address diversity. This “template” could make the process easier, more consistent and possibly, more efficient for policy writers; it is not, however, intended to be the ONLY acceptable model. It is, rather, a starting point that will allow education leaders to draft/adapt/modify policy in order to meet the needs of their schools and communities. The Tool Kit *is* compatible with the policy development model of your choice.

This template emphasizes the importance of public participation and consultation in addressing education policies that focus on diversity or any other sensitive subject.

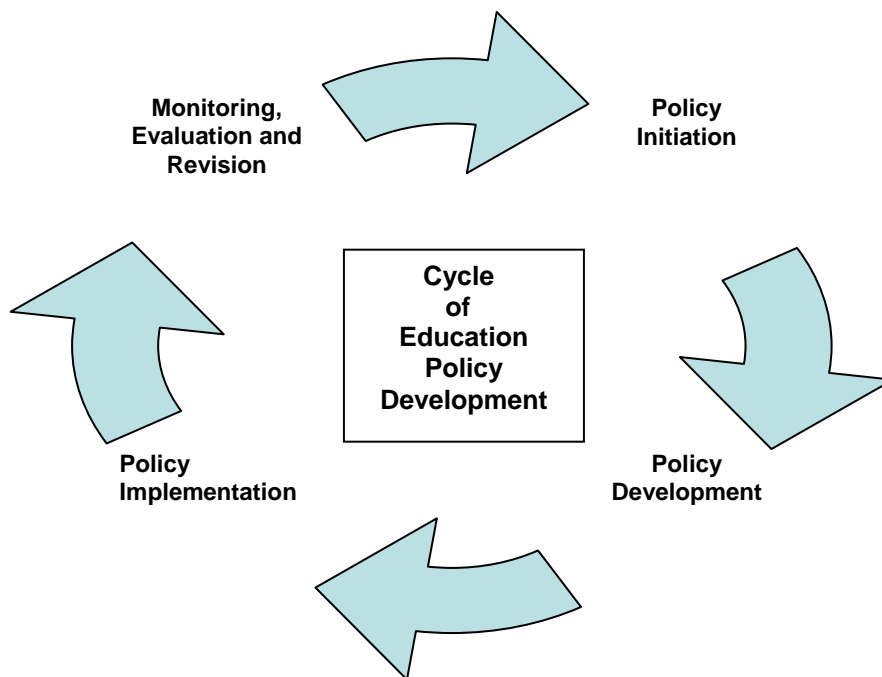
For a detailed outline of this model, please see Appendix A.

Recommended timelines

Ideally, research indicates that an education policy process is cyclical in nature. The end of a previous school year could be an ideal time to begin collecting information regarding possible issues although issues do arise at any time.

Monitoring effectiveness of the new policy may need to be ongoing in the initial stages and formally reviewed in three to five years after initial introduction. The impact of policy changes in schools and communities requires timely response to policy needs and policy development.

Planning Cycle for Education Policy Development



Critical Questions

What are our values in this school? In our community?

What types of diversity are represented in our school?

Do you think there may be groups that are afraid to make themselves known?

Do we have specific concerns, or are we taking preventative action?

Are there specific prejudices that we need to address?

Do we already have a policy in place that addresses or partially addresses these concerns?

If incidents do occur, what is our process for addressing it?

How do we build a culture of inclusivity?

How do we celebrate uniqueness?

What types of behaviours are we trying to encourage?

What do we already do to encourage respect for diversity?

Do we have local expertise that we can draw from (community organizations, not-for-profit groups, businesses) when developing this policy?

Hate Crime Statistics

According to the most recent Justice Canada research on hate crimes, the majority of police-recorded hate crimes in Canada were directed against racial minorities:

- 61% of all hate crime victims were racial minorities
- 23% of all hate crime victims were religious minorities
- 11% of all hate crime victims were gays or lesbians

(Source: Disproportionate Harm: Hate Crime in Canada—An Analysis of Recent Statistics. Canada Justice)

36 % of visible minorities in Canada feel they have experienced discrimination and unfair treatment because of ethno-cultural characteristics⁵. Today, nearly half of Canada's citizens (47%) are of ethnic origin other than British, French or native-born Canadian.

(Source: A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan Against Racism—An Overview. Canadian Heritage)