

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 for 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 policy.

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

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).
- 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.



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).

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.
- 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 wellbeing 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.

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:

Bill 10 recognizes that parents have both the right and responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. (Alberta Bill of Rights, s.1 (g); School Act, preamble, par. 2; Education Act, preamble, par. 8 upon proclamation).

The following two step process will be used to advise parents regarding the formation of LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs in Edmonton Catholic Schools:

Step 1 – A general notice will be provided to the District through the Superintendent's Message for school newsletters that students may be organizing LIFE Framework/Diversity clubs at their schools 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) in the school newsletter. 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.

April 29, 2015



References

BILL 10: AN ACT TO AMEND THE ALBERTA BILL OF RIGHTS TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

Amendments to the School Act

Support for student organizations

16.1(1) If a student requests a staff member employed by the board that operates the school attended by the student for support to establish or lead an activity or organization intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and that staff member does not provide the requested support, that failure to support the student is deemed to be a decision that may be appealed to the board in accordance with section 123.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an activity or organization includes an activity or organization that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitation, race, religious beliefs, color, gender, physical disability, mental disability, family status, sexual orientation and gender identity, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

(3) A decision of the board under section 123 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final, subject to the right to judicial review set out in subsection (4).

(4) A decision of the board referred to in subsection (3) may be challenged on judicial review for jurisdictional error or unreasonableness.

