

# **LIFE Framework in Edmonton Catholic Schools**

## **“Lived Inclusion for Everyone”**

### **A. 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*.

### **B. 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.

### **C. 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 will be formed when there is a student request. (*School Act*, s.16.1(1)(a))(see Appendix A)

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, activities will promote equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitations, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status, or sexual orientation. (*School Act*, s.16.1(2))(see Appendix A)

### **D. Who might be served by LIFE Framework student groups?**

- All students

### **E. Naming of LIFE Framework student groups**

The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the LIFE group as per legislation (*School Act*, s.16.1(3))(see Appendix A) after consulting with the principal. These names will incorporate language that is respectful of the teachings of the Catholic Church, and will respect the inclusive intent of this document.



## **F. Facilitation of Student Groups:**

- The principal will designate a Catholic teacher to facilitate all LIFE groups. (*School Act*, s. 16.1(1)(b))(see Appendix A)
- 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.
- 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.

## **G. General norms of LIFE 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:

### **a) 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.

## **b) 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).

## **c) 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.

### **H. Informing parents about LIFE Framework student groups:**

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 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. At all times, parents are invited to converse with the school regarding the intention of the LIFE Framework/Diversity Club.

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**Appendix A: 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 “queer-straight 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 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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