

Education Programs and Services

Locally Developed Religious Studies Courses

BACKGROUND

Locally developed religious studies courses approved by Alberta Learning have reflected primarily the interest of Roman Catholic school districts in the province in receiving credits for instruction devoted to the study of the Catholic faith. The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association Consortium Program was approved on the condition that the emphasis in 20% of the content of each course (Religious Studies 15-25-35) be placed on comparative religious studies. This redirected some of the focus of the program from single faith religious instruction to include the comparative study of other world religions. A distinction between religious instruction and religious studies is made on this basis, which qualifies religious studies courses for credit.

The growth of private schools in the province has resulted in requests to offer Religious Studies 15, 25, 35 in a manner that reflects the religious values and belief systems of the particular support group. The right of private schools to offer credits for instruction based on their particular religious values and belief systems, is recognized by this province provided certain conditions are met, such as opportunity for students to develop a respect and understanding for other major world faiths.

POLICY

Alberta Learning recognizes the right of all school authorities to reflect their particular views and belief systems in locally developed religious studies courses, provided that such courses develop respect and promote understanding of individual and minority group differences; develop an understanding and appreciation of the beliefs, customs and practices, literature and traditions of other major world religions; develop critical thinking; develop desirable personal characteristics; and conform to other provincial policies.

STATUTE

School Act

Private schools

28(1) A school is entitled to be registered as a private school if the

operator applies to the Minister and the Minister is satisfied that

- (a) the school will provide a program of studies that complies with any orders made under section 39(1)(f)....

(2) A private school is entitled to be accredited a private school if

- (a) the Minister approves the education program and any modification of it offered at the school,

Courses, programs, etc.

39(1) The Minister may do the following:

- (a) prescribe courses of study or education programs, including the amount of instruction time;
- (b) authorize courses of study, education programs or instructional materials for use in schools;
- (c) prescribe the minimum total hours of instruction a board shall make available to a student in a school year;
- (d) approve any course, education program or instructional material that may be submitted to the Minister by a board or another operator of a school for use in a school;
- (e) subject to the right of a board to provide religious instruction, by order prohibit the use of a course, an education program or instructional material in schools;
- (f) by order adopt or approve goals and standards applicable to the provision of education in Alberta.

Religious and patriotic instruction**50(1)** A board may

- (a) prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students;
 - (b) prescribe religious exercises for its students...
 - (e) permit persons other than teachers to provide religious instruction to its students.
- (2)** Where a teacher or other person providing religious or patriotic instruction receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from religious or patriotic instruction or exercises, or both, the teacher or other person shall permit the student
- (a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction or exercises are taking place for the duration of the instruction or exercises, or
 - (b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction or exercises.

Powers of boards**60 (2)** A board may

- (a) subject to section 39 and the regulations, develop, acquire or offer courses or programs;
- (b) subject to section 39 and the regulations, develop or acquire instructional materials for use in programs or in schools;

ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS

In this policy,

- 1 "school authorities" means boards and funded private schools.

PROCEDURES

- 1 All locally developed religious studies courses and learning resources shall be consistent with the Ministerial Order made under section 39(1)(f) of the **Act**.

- 2 Documentation submitted to the Director, Curriculum Branch, Alberta Learning, with a request for approval, shall include evidence that the course has been reviewed and meets Alberta Learning's *Recognizing Diversity and Promoting Respect*. The course should promote understanding and respect for individual and minority group differences, and promote the development of critical thinking.
- 3 School authorities shall conform to the procedures outlined in *Locally Developed / Acquired and Authorized Junior and Senior High Complementary Courses* (Policy 1.2.1).
- 4 Religious Studies courses may contain up to 80% content based on a particular faith or belief/value system and shall include 20% content in each course (Religious Studies 15-25-35) that addresses a comparative study of other religions.
- 5 The 20% of the content that addresses a comparative study of other world religions shall relate specifically to a comparative study of major world religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, etc.
- 6 School authorities wishing to offer the already approved Religious Studies 15, 25, 35 sequence outlines of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association Consortium Program should obtain permission for use from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association.
- 7 Alberta Learning does not provide additional funding for locally developed religious studies courses.

REFERENCES

Please refer to the current editions of the following for additional information:

Guide to Education

Guidelines for Recognizing Diversity and Promoting Respect

Locally Developed/Acquired and Authorized Junior and Senior High School Complementary Courses (Policy 1.2.1)

See Section 7 of the *Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual* for information on where the above document(s) may be obtained, and for Department / Branch addresses, phone and fax numbers.