

# Toronto District School Board

Operational Procedure PR.532 CUR

Title: **HANDLING CONCERNS ABOUT LEARNING RESOURCES AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

Adopted: September 1, 2001

Revised: **May 20, 2009**, September 6, 2006,  
September 22, 2003 (replaces C.006: Handling Concerns About Learning Resources, September 1, 2001)

Authorization:

## 1.0 OBJECTIVE

To provide the procedures to be followed when individuals or groups request the withdrawal of a particular curriculum resource from a class, a school, or the entire school system

## 2.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Associate Director

## 3.0 PROCEDURES

### Part A: Concerns About Learning Resources

#### 3.1 Concern Received at a School

- (a) When a principal receives a request from an individual or group (requestor) to remove a learning resource from a class or the school, the principal, in consultation with the teacher, will confer with the requestor to attempt to resolve the concerns. The principal must evaluate how proposed resolutions would affect the Board's ability to implement the Ontario Curriculum and to honour its commitment to equity, inclusion, and the critical examination of controversial issues. (See form 532A for recommended questions.)
- (b) If the concerns are not resolved, the principal will inform the local superintendent of schools and the local trustee of the problem and the results of the conference.
- (c) If the matter is not resolved at the school level, the principal will advise the requestor that a written request for reconsideration of learning materials may be submitted to the executive superintendent of School Services, Central. (See form 532B.)

- (d) Upon receipt of form 532B from the requestor, the executive superintendent will assemble a review committee consisting of the local superintendent of schools, the appropriate district-wide coordinator (co-chairs), other Board staff, as needed, an in-school representative, and a community resource person, as needed.
- (e) The review committee will provide a written report of its decision, including a rationale, to the executive superintendent of School Services, Central, who will forward a copy of the written report to the requestor. All trustees will be informed of the review committee's response.
- (f) A trustee may request to meet with the co-chairs of the review committee and senior staff to offer suggestions to the Director. This request must be communicated to all trustees for their possible participation.
- (g) The Director will make the final decision regarding the appropriateness of the learning resource in the Board's schools and will inform the trustees of the decision.
- (h) Should any requestor disagree with the Director's decision, they may appeal directly to the Board.

### 3.2 Concern Received Beyond the School Level

- (a) When a request to remove a learning resource from the school system is received from an individual or group (requestor), the request will be referred to the program coordinator (PC) of the subject area who, in consultation with appropriate staff who will confer with the requestor to attempt to resolve the concerns. The PC must evaluate how proposed resolutions would affect the Board's ability to implement the Ontario Curriculum and to honour its commitment to equity, inclusion, and the critical examination of controversial issues.
- (b) If the concerns are not resolved, the program coordinator will inform the executive superintendent of School Services, Central, and the local trustee of the concerns, report on the results of the initial conference, and advise the requestor that a written request for reconsideration of learning materials may be submitted to the executive superintendent of School Services, Central (see Form 532B).
- (c) Upon receipt of Form 532B from the requestor, the executive superintendent of School Services, Central, will assemble a review committee comprised of the superintendent of program, the program coordinator, a community resource person, other resource personnel, and Board staff, as needed.
- (d) The review committee will provide a written report of its decision, including a rationale, to the executive superintendent of School Services, Central, who will forward a copy to the Director and the requestor. All trustees will be informed of the review committee's response.

- (e) A trustee may request to meet with the co-chairs of the review committee and senior staff to offer suggestions to the Director. This request must be communicated to all trustees for their possible participation.
- (f) The Director will make the final decision regarding the appropriateness of the learning resource in the Board's schools and will inform the trustees of the decision.
- (g) Should any requestor disagree with the Director's decision, the requestor may appeal directly to the Board.

Questions or concerns may be directed to the program coordinator for the appropriate subject area.

## Part B: Concerns About Controversial Issues

### 3.3 Guidelines for School Activities on Controversial Issues

Democracy supports discussion and advocacy on controversial issues. Controversial issues include political conflicts in the various parts of the world. Individuals and groups have the right to participate in advocacy activities on controversial issues as long as they respect the law and human rights.

In schools, all activities are intended to support educational goals. These goals include: building awareness, understanding, skills, knowledge and critical thinking among students. To achieve these goals, all activities must take place in an environment of respect. Using biased or inflammatory language, or any form of harassment damages this environment.

These activities must reflect the purpose of the Board's Equity, Human Rights and Safe Schools policies. The resource document, "Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Issues in Classrooms," helps teachers to support and manage respectful school and classroom activities.

The principal will ensure that any school activity dealing with controversial issues:

- (a) Conforms to the educational goals of the Board and the school;
- (b) Fosters a supportive, respectful and caring environment;
- (c) Avoids all forms of intimidation, harassment or discrimination;
- (d) Does not use materials or symbols which promote prejudice or incite hatred;
- (e) Improves the understanding that diverse groups have of each other; and
- (f) Is not controlled or manipulated by external advocacy groups.

The principal will inform staff, students and the community of these guidelines, especially before they undertake a school activity on a controversial issue. Sometimes

a staff, student, parent or community group may raise a concern about a particular activity in the school dealing with a controversial issue. In such cases, the principal will gather all relevant information before making a decision in the best interests of the school. Where appropriate, the principal will consult with the superintendent of education.

#### **4.0 APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Background Information About Learning Resources

#### **5.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

Form 532A: Recommended Questions for a Conference at the School Level

Form 532B: Individual/Group Request for Reconsideration of Learning Resources

Operational Procedure PR.531 CUR: Selection and Approval of Learning Resources

Guidelines for Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Issues:

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=8975&pageid=7864>

[http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/Equity\\_in\\_Education/docs/CSI%202003.pdf](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/Equity_in_Education/docs/CSI%202003.pdf)

Background Information About Learning Resources

1. From time to time, schools receive complaints from parents and other citizens about materials, both print and non-print, in school libraries and classrooms. Any citizen living in the school district has the right to challenge these resources on the basis of appropriateness.
2. All complaints represent a legitimate concern on the part of the person(s) making them and deserve to be treated seriously and with respect. In addition, an initial response made in good faith will often result in an amicable agreement being reached.
3. The Board's Policy B.03: Equity Foundation Statement and Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation provides a broad framework for evaluating requests related to learning resources in schools.
4. A curriculum that strives for equity provides a balance of perspectives. The TDSB is committed to ensuring that the principles and practices of equity permeate the curriculum in all subject areas. In practice, this means that schools will, in an ongoing way:
  - examine and challenge exclusive curriculum in order to ensure inclusiveness
  - determine whether discriminatory biases related to race, ethnicity, faith, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability or ability are present in existing learning materials, programs, or practices
  - ensure the review and/or critical use of resources that promote stereotyping, discrimination, hatred, or violence against people based on race, ethnicity, faith, gender, class, sexual orientation, or disability or ability
  - assist all staff to use curriculum resources effectively in order to promote critical thinking and to challenge individual and systemic discrimination
  - ensure that classrooms, resource centres, school libraries, audiovisual collections, and computer software contain materials and resources that accurately reflect Canada's diverse communities
5. The Board believes that the classroom is the natural place for critical examination of issues. It is the role of both the teacher and the student to read, view, and discuss with critical understanding the nature and degree of bias in the learning materials they encounter.
6. Bias exists in all learning materials. Educators consider both the obvious and inherent biases in these materials when they select them for classroom study, and carefully consider how to address controversial issues in ways that are appropriate and meaningful to students and programs.
7. Under the *Education Act*, parents<sup>1</sup> have the right to request that their child study alternate resources from those used by their classmates, where this is feasible and consistent with the Ontario Curriculum. Requests of this kind are best discussed with the child's teacher and, if necessary, the principal of the child's school.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *parents* includes guardians and caregivers legally recognized as acting in place of a parent.