

COLLABORATING TO CREATE A WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPECTS DIVERSITY AND FOSTERS A SENSE OF BELONGING

“It takes a whole village to raise a child”

The new Education Act, expected to be proclaimed in 2015, makes it clear that establishing a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment is the responsibility of many. Section 33 clarifies the school board’s responsibility to 1 (d) *ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging*

and furthermore (2) *A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board’s obligation under subsection 1(d) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.*

The Act also addresses under section 31 each student’s responsibility to (c) *ensure that the student’s conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that*

respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and to refrain from, report and not tolerate bullying or bullying behaviour directed toward others in the school, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means,

Furthermore, the Act defines a Parent’s responsibility, as a partner in education, to 32(d) *ensure that the parent’s conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment.*

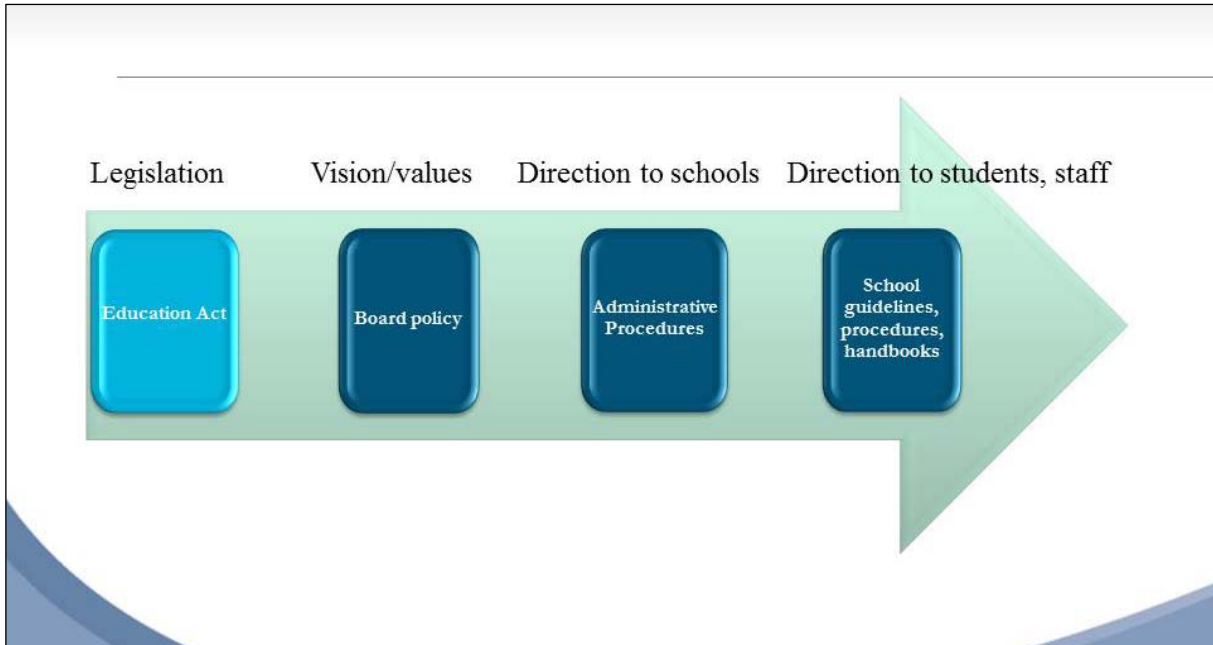
Authority and Responsibility

Legislation provides both authority and responsibility of school boards to establish welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. School boards are given the authority and responsibility under the Act to set direction for the entire division. They exercise this authority through the creation of

policy. The superintendent is entrusted, in the Act, with the day-to-day management of the school division and does this through the creation of administrative procedures, in alignment with board policy, to guide schools and departments. A principal, under the Act, is entrusted with the leadership and management of a school and does this through the creation of guidelines and

procedures, and handbooks to direct staff, students and parents.





School board policy

Boards set the tone about how students, parents and staff will be treated through their foundations policies of mission, vision, beliefs and values.

Mission answers the fundamental questions “Why do we exist?” and “What is our core purpose?” With a new Education Act which describes evolving board responsibilities, including greater engagement and collaboration, boards should engage students, parents,

staff and communities in re-examining these questions. *Does our mission statement speak to only student achievement or does it emphasize the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of students?*

Vision describes an ideal future and answers the question “What do we want to create?” In this case, “How would you describe a learning environment in which everyone feels welcome and that they belong, that embraces

diversity and ensures that all feel safe?”

Beliefs and values describe your culture; what your jurisdiction holds dearly important and what you will use as the final filter for all decisions.





Engaging others

School boards routinely review board policy in terms of appropriateness and currency. By their nature, foundational policies are more timeless than most policies, but boards should engage the thoughts of others in reviewing foundational policies to determine if they continue to align with legislation and the expectations of the communities they lead.

<http://www.asba.ab.ca/public-engage-tools.asp>



Engagement tools

Town hall meetings: Can engage the thoughts of many in a structured format with facilitators at each table to guide the conversation and record the recommendations. Conversation points should be sorted into themes.

Online surveys: Can engage the thoughts of many through online questions. Survey questions should be clear and the responses sorted into themes.

Focus groups: Can be diverse, representing a cross-section of population or can be small groups of like demographics only such as students, parents or staff.

One-on-one conversations: Trustees can engage the views of individual students, parents, and the business community.

Focus groups and on-on-one conversations are often used to “drill deeper” into the themes that emerged from large scale engagements such as online surveys or town hall meetings.



FOR MORE RESOURCES ON CREATING A WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, GO TO [HTTP://SAFEANDCARING.CA/](http://SAFEANDCARING.CA/)

Focused questions/conversation

Opening: The new Education Act, which is due to be proclaimed in September, 2015 suggests that school boards, schools, students and parents have a common role in creating and supporting a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

Objective questions:

- ◆ What have you heard from your school, in the media or from others about this new legislation?
- ◆ What have you heard or read about types of diversity?
- ◆ What catches your attention about this part of the new Education Act?

Reflective Questions:

- ◆ Which of these words or phrases stand out for you?
- ◆ Which words and phrases need further definition or understanding by others?
- ◆ What do you like about this description of an ideal learning environment? What makes you uneasy?

Interpretive Questions

- ◆ What implications does this description of an ideal learning environment have for our schools?
- ◆ How may school board foundational policies of mission/vision/beliefs/values need to change to reflect this preferred learning environment?
- ◆ How may everyone working toward this preferred learning environment affect the cultures of our communities?

Decisional Questions

- ◆ How can we work together to ensure a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging?
- ◆ What should school boards/schools emphasize in creating policies and/or procedures to address this ideal learning environment?

