

SSBA Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Policy Advisory (2023)

Sample Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Policy

Preamble:

Saskatchewan school boards have adopted a Position Statement on Inclusive Education, which states:

“Diversity enriches school culture and increases knowledge and understanding of similarities and differences. Within an education sector and system, diversity applies to a range of contexts such as cultures, socio-economic situations, languages, learning needs, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Education in Saskatchewan is founded on a principle of respect for the diversity of all students and families. It is through conversations with students and families that educators, administration, staff, and boards of education develop a growing awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures and communities in their schools. In Saskatchewan ‘inclusive education’ is used to describe education for students with diverse backgrounds. The Ministry of Education defines inclusive education as ‘providing equitable treatment and appropriate, high-quality education to all students. It encompasses a blend of philosophical beliefs, practices, and processes to create flexible support systems and learning environments based on students’ strengths, abilities, interests and needs.’ Ultimately, the goal of inclusive education is to presume the competence and strength of the learner, reduce exclusion by eliminating barriers to one’s school success, and enhance participation and sense of belonging in one’s community. This includes anti-racist, anti-oppressive and equity practices.”

(Source: Saskatchewan School Boards Association Adopted Position 2.5: Inclusive Education.)

The Board upholds the principles of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the “Charter”)*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and confirmed in *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, 2018 (the “Code”)*. The Board recognizes that equity of opportunity and equity of access to the full range of programs, the delivery of services, and resources are critical to the achievement of successful educational and social outcomes for those served by the school system as well as those who serve the system.

Within the context of the Treaty relationship in Canada, the Board is committed to respecting diversity and to an equitable, inclusive and accessible education system that is affirming and upholds and reflects equity and inclusionary principles, which permeate all policies, programs, practices and operations.

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Policy Statements:

(Each policy statement relates to an area of focus indicated in bold heading. Boards are encouraged to consider policy statements that address each of these areas of focus and sample statements follow each heading for boards to consider adapting for their local contexts.)

It is the Policy of the Board to:

- 1) **BOARD POLICIES, PROGRAMS, GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES:**
Serve its diverse populations of students, staff, families, Elders and community partners by incorporating principles of equitable, inclusive and accessible education into all aspects of its policies, programs, practices and operations, consistent with the *Code*.
- 2) **SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS:**
Establish and maintain collaborative relationships so that the perspectives and experiences of all students, staff, families and Elders and community partners are recognized, understood and honoured, and that student needs are respected, addressed and met.
- 3) **SHARED AND COMMITTED LEADERSHIP:**
Commit to an informed leadership philosophy that engages, empowers and supports all stakeholders to join together to implement practices and behaviours that cultivate understanding of equity, inclusion and accessibility.
- 4) **RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION:**
Acknowledge each individual's fundamental freedoms under the *Charter* to follow or not to follow religious beliefs and practices free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour and is committed to taking all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations to students and staff.
- 5) **SCHOOL CLIMATE AND PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT:**
Commit to the principle that every person within the school community is entitled to a welcoming, respectful, affirming, and positive school climate and learning environment, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.
- 6) **ELIMINATION OF BARRIERS TO BELONGING:**
Participate in ongoing development of practices that promote equitable treatment for all and cultivate mutual respect, civility and a sense of belonging, and continue to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit the opportunities of students and staff.
- 7) **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:**
Provide administrators, staff, students and other members of the school community with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and systemic barriers under the *Code*.
- 8) **ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY:**
Assess and monitor Board progress in implementing strategy to embed the principles into all Board policies, programs, guidelines and practices; and to communicate these results to the community to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 9) **SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:**
Promote a collaborative approach and support all members of the school community in the shared responsibility for creating a welcoming, equitable, inclusive and accessible environment which honours and respects everyone.

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Appendix A – Additional Information

Inclusionary Philosophy and Beliefs

SSBA Position Statement 2.5 Inclusive Education also includes the following Inclusionary Philosophy and Beliefs:

1. All students and families are welcomed and respected.
2. All students have opportunities to experience positive interpersonal interactions that support the development of authentic relationships.
3. All students have access to activities that promote positive self-esteem, engagement, and a sense of belonging.
4. Individual interests, backgrounds, life experiences and identities are valued.
5. Schools engage parents/guardians in meaningful ways (e.g., parents/guardians are provided ways to support their child's learning and development).
6. Curricula are used as the starting point for developing and implementing adaptations to support student learning. This may include referring to previous grade-level curricula to support individualized learning needs.
7. Differentiated instruction is used, including multi-level instructional approaches, so all learners in a classroom can participate and are engaged.
8. Ensure resources, practices are reflective of students – where students can see themselves in the resources and assessment/instructional practices.
9. Learning opportunities are provided that are: challenging; engaging; culturally and linguistically affirming and responsive; developmentally fitting; and age appropriate.
10. Accessibility – barriers to learning are reduced or eliminated by providing access to appropriate learning opportunities and resources identifying and implementing supports (including technology) to optimize student learning; and supporting the development and attainment of competencies and independence.
11. Schools, classrooms, common learning areas and other learning spaces provide emotionally safe environments, acknowledge the culture, language(s) and background of students, and incorporate physical adaptations as necessary.

Guiding Principles of Inclusive Education

The following Guiding Principles are from Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy:

Equity and inclusive education:

- Is a foundation of excellence.
- Meets individual needs.
- Identifies and eliminates barriers.
- Promotes a sense of belonging.
- Involves the broad community.
- Builds on and enhances previous and existing initiatives.
- Is demonstrated throughout the system.

Appendix B – Acknowledgements

Resources from the following websites were consulted in developing this policy advisory: SSBA Position Statement 2.5, Ontario Public School Boards Association, Ontario Education Services Corporation, ARC Foundation, Calgary Board of Education, Durham Catholic District School Board, Edmonton Catholic Schools, Edmonton Public Schools, Good Spirit School Division, Langley School District, Limestone District School Board, Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools, Ottawa Catholic School Board, Prairie South Schools, Prairie Spirit School Division, Prairie Valley School Division, Saskatoon Public Schools, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Toronto District School Board, Upper Grand District School Board, Vancouver School Board, Western School Division, Winnipeg School Division, York Region District School Board