

Date: June 18, 2025 **Agenda Item:** 7.6

To: Board of Trustees

From: Shawna Warren, Superintendent

Originator(s): Committee of the Whole
Policy Committee
Shawna Warren, Superintendent

Subject: **Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction**

Recommended Motion:

THAT the Board of Trustees rescind Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction.

Background:

The Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining a policy framework that is strategic, relevant and aligned with the Division's mission and legal obligations. Research demonstrates that student achievement and well-being are best supported when boards focus on governance policies that provide clear direction while delegating administrative matters to staff (Leithwood, 2013). Regular policy reviews are essential to ensure that policies remain relevant and effective. In line with this commitment, the Policy Committee has identified several policies for rescission, as they are either outdated, redundant or better addressed through administrative procedures.

As part of this commitment, the Board has approved a transition to the G-Tech Model, which emphasizes high-impact governance policies and the delegation of operational matters to administration. This model is widely adopted among Alberta school divisions and is supported by governance best practices, including those outlined by the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) and in Module 7: Exercising Effective Governance.

Board Policy 225: Role of the Board establishes that the Board's core governance responsibilities include:

- Developing policies that guide the Division's mission, vision and improvement efforts.
- Ensuring that policies focus on accountability, equity and student success.
- Delegating operational details to administration.

Furthermore, Section 33(1)(i) of the Education Act mandates that the Board has the responsibility to "ensure effective stewardship of the Board's resources". Streamlining policies by removing redundancies and transferring operational matters to administrative procedures supports this requirement. Streamlining policies by removing redundancies and transferring operational matters to administrative procedures supports this requirement and aligns with the G-Tech Model's focus on maintaining a strategic and student-focused policy framework.

Principles of Effective Policy Making:

As outlined in the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) *Module 7: Exercising Authentic Governance*, strong school boards develop and maintain policies that:

- Focus on student achievement and well-being.
- Provide clear direction without micromanaging administrative functions.
- Ensure compliance with legislation and government requirements.
- Engage stakeholders through open and accountable policy development.
- Enable effective decision-making and risk management.
- Align with evidence-based practices and board goals.
- Ensure policy relevance through cyclical reviews and stakeholder engagement.

Review and Recommendation:

Administration conducted a thorough review of the policies, referring to the G-Tech Model, and reviewing other School Boards who use the G-Tech Model.

Review of Policy 800:

- February 24, 2025, Policy Committee reviewed a group of policies that Administration brought forward as consideration for rescission based on the G-Tech model. The recommendation from the Policy Committee was for the policies to be sent to the next CoW for further discussion and then moved to the March 19, 2025, Public Board meeting for rescission;
- March 5, 2025, Reviewed at Committee of the Whole. Recommendation from Committee of the Whole - An omnibus memo for these policies to be rescinded is to be brought to the March 19, 2025, Public Board meeting;
- March 19, 2025, Public Board meeting, the Omnibus Motion (Policies 100, 215, 800, 805, 810, 815 and 910) was defeated;
- April 16, 2025, Policy Committee meeting. The Policy Committee recommended that Policies 215 and 800 be removed from the Omnibus Motion and brought forward as independent motions;
- April 23, 2025, Public Board Meeting, motion to defer to the next Committee of the Whole; and
- May 7, 2025, Committee of the Whole, recommendation that separate memos for policies 100, 805, 810, 815 and 910 be brought to the May 28, 2025, Public Board meeting for review and approval.
- June 18, 2025, Committee of the Whole, Policy 800 was reviewed again and brought to the June 18, 2025, Public Board meeting for review and approval.

Rationale:

- **Legislative Coverage:** The content of Policy 800 is fully addressed within the Education Act, specifically:
 - Section 19: Alternative Programs, which governs the provision of education programs that emphasize a particular religion, language, culture, or subject matter;

- Section 58: Religious and Patriotic Instruction or Exercises, which permits such instruction under specified conditions; and
 - Section 58.1: Notice to Parent, which outlines the requirement to provide advance written notice and accommodate parent choice regarding religious content.
- These sections ensure that any religious instruction or programming delivered within a public school setting is regulated, transparent and respectful of parental rights and student diversity.
- **Operational Oversight through Administrative Procedure:** Matters related to religious education and instruction are operational in nature and are best addressed through an administrative procedure that ensures compliance with legislation, consistency in practice and responsiveness to local context. This policy will be managed through a new Administrative Procedure:
 - AP831: Religious Education and Instruction
- This new procedure will provide clear guidance for school-level implementation, including parental notification, exemption processes and adherence to constitutional and legal obligations.
- **Redundancy and Clarity:** Maintaining a Board policy that reiterates what is already captured in legislation and in an administrative procedure introduces unnecessary duplication. Rescinding Policy 800 allows for a clearer and more efficient policy framework, ensuring the Board's focus remains on governance-level priorities rather than operational implementation.
- **Alignment with Effective Governance Practices:** In accordance with Module 7: Exercising Effective Governance (PSBAA), Board policies should be limited to areas requiring governance oversight, accountability structures, or strategic direction. Since religious instruction is legislated and operationally administered, it no longer meets the threshold for Board-level policy.
- **Support for the G-Tech Model:** This rescission reflects the Board's commitment to the G-Tech governance model by ensuring policies remain high-impact, non-operational and legally aligned. It enables administration to continue delivering religious and alternative programming in accordance with Alberta Education legislation and locally developed procedures.

Governance Implications:

- **Clarity in Roles and Responsibilities:**
 - The Board is responsible for setting **direction and priorities**, while the Superintendent oversees **operational implementation**.

- **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:**
 - These changes ensure alignment with the **Education Act**, which requires policies to focus on **board governance** rather than operational matters.
- **Efficiency and Accountability:**
 - **Reducing policy clutter** allows the Board to concentrate on **strategic priorities** that impact student success and system improvement.
- **Transparency and Public Confidence:**
 - By focusing on **high-impact policies**, the Board ensures that its governance efforts remain **student-centered and publicly accountable**.
- **Support for the G-Tech Model:**
 - This initiative reinforces the Board's commitment to a governance framework that is modern, focused and aligned with Alberta's leading practices for effective school board governance.

Status & Relationship to Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS):

This report aligns with the [SLQS](#) in the following way:

COMPETENCY:	(3) Visionary Leadership
INDICATORS:	<p>c. promoting in the school community a common understanding of and support for the school authority's goals, priorities and strategic initiatives; and</p> <p>d. ensuring that the vision expressed in the school authority's education plan is responsive to the ongoing review of the school authority's achievements, meets all requirements identified in provincial legislation and incorporates the school community's perspectives.</p>
COMPETENCY:	(6) School Authority Operations and Resources
INDICATORS:	<p>a. providing direction on fiscal and resource management in accordance with all statutory, regulatory and school authority requirements;</p> <p>c. delegating responsibility to staff, where appropriate, to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness; and</p> <p>e. establishing data-informed strategic planning and decision-making processes that are responsive to changing contexts.</p>

COMPETENCY:

(7) Supporting Effective Governance

INDICATORS:

d. ensuring that the board's plans, resource allocations, strategies and procedures lead to the achievement of its goals and priorities;
f. supporting the board in the fulfilment of its governance functions in the fiduciary, strategic and generative realms; and
g. implementing board policies and supporting the regular review and evaluation of their impact.

Governance Implications:**Education Act**

Board responsibilities

33(1) A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

(i) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources,

Board Procedures Regulation

Policies and procedures

4 The board must

(a) establish policies and procedures governing the conduct of meetings of the board and the administration and business of the board, and

(b) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the established policies and procedures on a regular basis.

Policy 225: Role of the Board

Governance and Organization

26. Develop, approve and monitor the implementation of policies to guide the Division and the Board.

28. Monitor the development, revision and implementation of policy

Administration is prepared to respond to questions at the June 18, 2025, Public Board meeting.

Attachment(s):

1. Policy 800: Religious Education and Instruction
2. Draft Administrative Procedure 831: Religious Education and Instruction
3. Board Policy List
4. PSBAA Policy Checklist
5. G-Tec Model

800: Religious Education and Instruction - Recommend to Rescind and move to an Administrative Procedure

Captured in Legislation - Education Act Section 19 “Alternative Programs”, Section 58 “Religious and Patriotic Instruction or Exercises” including Section 58.1 Notice to Parent

1.0 POLICY

The Board believes that our schools have a role in helping children develop emotionally, intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually.

The Board believes in religious tolerance, the acknowledgement of religious diversity, the maintenance of inclusive environments in its schools, and the provision of appropriate opportunities for students to give expression to their religious beliefs.

The Board believes that while many education activities may be perceived to include incidental or indirect reference to religion or religious themes, these may provide valuable learning and cultural opportunities for students, serve to acknowledge the religious diversity that exists among students, and provide students with opportunity to express their personal beliefs, when done in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner and does not involve indoctrination.

2.0 GUIDELINES

2.1 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada, and the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Board encourages the practice of providing opportunities for students to take part in religious instruction during the day and may prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students.

2.2 Offering religious instruction

2.2.1 The Principal shall annually:

2.2.1.1 Inquire of parents/guardians as to whether or not they wish to have their child(ren) participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.1.2 Facilitate receipt of written approval for students whose parents/guardians wish them to participate in any religious instruction course.

2.2.1.3 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada and the Alberta Human Rights Act:

2.2.1.3.1 Receive indication from any parents/ guardians who do not wish to have their child(ren) participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.1.3.2 Make provision to provide an alternate course of instruction for any student(s) whose parents/guardians do not wish them to participate in a religious instruction course.

2.2.2 Approval Process

2.2.2.1 Whenever parents/guardians request that religious instruction courses be made available at a school, the Principal shall advise the Superintendent, who will advise the Board of Trustees.

2.2.2.2 The Board of Trustees may, through the Superintendent, direct the Principal to determine the degree of parent/guardian interest around such request for religious instruction courses through surveys, meetings or any other appropriate means of gathering information, and establish a timeframe for such undertaking.

2.2.2.3 The Principal shall present information obtained, including the rationale for the request for religious instruction courses and the determined degree of parent/guardian interest in the request, to the Board and seek Board prescription of such courses.

2.2.2.4 The Board shall consider the rationale presented, including the tradition and culture of the school community, as well as the determined degree of parent/guardian interest and may prescribe the religious instruction courses to be included in the school's course offerings.

2.2.2.5 For schools where the Board prescribes religious instruction courses, the Principal shall typically present information regarding such courses as part of the school's instructional program plan for the coming school year. Such information shall include:

2.2.2.5.1 The grades or grade groupings for which religious instruction will be offered,

2.2.2.5.2 The scheduling, as per legislation, of instruction per week,

2.2.2.5.3 The process by which parents/guardians will indicate their approval or non-approval for their child(ren) to participate in a religious instruction course,

2.2.2.5.4 The course of instruction to be offered to any student whose parents/guardians indicate that their child is not to participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.2.5.5 If any persons other than teachers are to provide the religious instruction to the students.

2.3 Alternative Programs

In accordance with The Education Act the Board may establish an alternative program that emphasizes religion and includes:

2.3.1 Courses of study

2.3.2 Instructional materials, and

2.3.3 Instruction or exercises that deal primarily and explicitly with religion.

2.4 Participation in Activities

2.4.1 The Board authorizes student participation in the following activities which may include incidental or indirect reference to religion or religious themes:

2.4.1.1 A moment of silence at a special event such as a Remembrance Day ceremony,

2.4.1.2 Appropriate and inclusive ceremonial prayer at special events such as graduation exercises,

2.4.1.3 Participation in extra-curricular activities such as religious clubs,

2.4.1.4 Preparation for, and performance of, musical or dramatic selections with incidental religious themes or content, with the understanding that such selections shall not contain religious exercises such as prayers or bible readings and where the preparation and performance of those selections takes place in an inclusive, nondiscriminatory manner and do not involve indoctrination.

2.4.1.5 Concerts and activities in recognition of holidays with a religious basis, where such concerts and activities do not contain religious exercises such as prayers or bible readings and the concert or activity takes place in an inclusive, non-discriminatory manner and do not involve indoctrination.

2.4.1.6 Activities of a religious nature associated with the study of other cultures, and activities as part of provincially authorized courses of study such as Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meanings 20, and World Religions 30 where sufficient student interest warrants the offering of such courses.

2.4.2 Parent Notification and Exemption Provisions

2.4.2.1 In accordance with the Education Act, parents/guardians shall be provided notice where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion.

2.4.2.2 Exemptions from Participation Principals shall ensure that:

2.4.2.2.1 Provision is made to accommodate the wishes of parents/guardians who make written request that their child(ren) be exempted from participating in activities dealing primarily and explicitly with religious theme or content,

2.4.2.2.2 An appropriate alternate activity is provided for nonparticipants

2.4.2.2.3 Depending on the parent request, the students are permitted to leave the classroom or place where the activity is taking place for the duration of the activity that includes the primary

and explicit religious theme or content, or the students are permitted to remain in the classroom or place of activity without taking part in the activity, and

2.4.2.2.4 Non-participants are treated discreetly and with respect at all times.

2.5 Wearing Faith-Based Symbols

Students may wear faith-based jewelry, objects or articles of clothing at school or during school sponsored activities, as long as these are worn discreetly, do not have a proselytizing message, and meet the requirements of the school's standards of dress and grooming.

References:

Education Act: Sections 16, 61, 58 (1) (a) (b), and 58.1

Alberta Act, 1905: Section 17

School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, 1901: Sections 137 and 138

Constitution Act, 1867: Section 93

Alberta Human Rights Act Preamble

History

2019 Mar 27 Initial Approval

2019 Oct 23 Reviewed

2020 Jan 29 Amended

2021 Oct 27 Reviewed

AP831: Religious Education and Instruction - Draft

Responsible Administrator: Deputy Superintendent, Education Services

PURPOSE

Sturgeon Public Schools believes that our schools have a role in helping students develop emotionally, intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually.

Sturgeon Public Schools believes in religious tolerance, the acknowledgement of religious diversity, the maintenance of inclusive environments in its schools and the provision of appropriate opportunities for students to give expression to their religious beliefs.

Sturgeon Public Schools believes that while many education activities may be perceived to include incidental or indirect reference to religion or religious themes, these may provide valuable learning and cultural opportunities for students, serve to acknowledge the religious diversity that exists among students and provide students with opportunity to express their personal beliefs, when done in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner and does not involve indoctrination.

PROCESS

The Deputy Superintendent, Education Services, shall be responsible for maintaining the procedure.

2.0 GUIDELINES

2.1 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada, and the Alberta Human Rights Act, Sturgeon Public Schools encourages the practice of providing opportunities for students to take part in religious instruction during the day and may prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students.

2.2 Offering religious instruction

2.2.1 The Principal shall annually:

2.2.1.1 Inquire of parents/guardians as to whether or not they wish to have their child(ren) participate in a religious instruction course, and

2.2.1.2 Facilitate receipt of written approval for students whose parents/guardians wish them to participate in any religious instruction course.

2.2.1.3 In accordance with the Education Act, the Alberta Act, the School Ordinance of the Northwest Territories, the Constitution of Canada and the Alberta Human Rights Act:

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2.2.2.2 The Deputy Superintendent may direct the Principal to determine the degree of parent/guardian interest around such request for religious instruction courses through surveys, meetings or any other appropriate means of gathering information, and establish a timeframe for such undertaking.

2.2.2.3 The Principal shall present information obtained, including the rationale for the request for religious instruction courses and the determined degree of parent/guardian interest in the request, to the Deputy and seek Deputy prescription of such courses.

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2.2.2.5.5 If any persons other than teachers are to provide the religious instruction to the students.

2.2.2.6 The Deputy Superintendent, or designate, shall report annually to the Board the number and location of schools offering religious instruction courses.

2.3 Alternative Programs

In accordance with The Education Act, the Division may establish an alternative program that emphasizes religion and includes:

2.3.1 Courses of study

2.3.2 Instructional materials, and

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History

2025 Jun 18 Initial Approval



Board Policy List

Policy 1: Vision, Mission and Values

Policy 2: Role of the Board
Appendix A: Advocacy Plan

Policy 3: Role of the Trustee

Policy 4: Trustee Code of Conduct
Appendix A: Code of Ethics
Appendix B: Code of Conduct Complaint
Appendix C: Code of Conduct Hearing

Policy 5: Role of the Board Chair (*in development*)

Policy 6: Role of the Vice Chair (*in development*)

Policy 7: Board Operations
Appendix A: Sturgeon Public Schools Board Organizational Meeting Agenda
Appendix B: Sturgeon Public Schools Board Meeting Agenda
Appendix C: Electoral Wards
Appendix D: Trustee Remuneration
Appendix E: Technology Equipment for Trustees

Policy 8: Board Committees
Appendix A: Committee of the Whole
Appendix B: Student Discipline Committee
Appendix C: ATA Negotiations Committee
Appendix D: Teacher Board Advisory Committee (TBAC)
Appendix E: C.U.P.E. Negotiations Committee
Appendix F: Labour Management Committee
Appendix G: Student Advisory Committee

Policy 9: Policy Development

Policy 10: Board Delegation of Authority

Policy 11: Superintendent of Schools

Policy 12: Attendance Areas





Policy 13: Appeals Regarding Student Matters

Policy 14: Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection)

Policy 15: School Closure

Policy 16: Public Use of School Buildings and Property

Policy 17: Inclement Weather

Policy 18: Student Transportation Services

Policy 19: Welcoming Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Environments

Policy 20: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities

Policy 21: Student Conduct and Discipline

Policy 22: Awards and Recognition

Policy 23: Employee Recognition

Policy 24: Educational Leaves of Professional Staff





Good Governance for School Boards

Trustee Professional Development Program

Module 7 – Exercising Effective Governance: The School Board’s Role as Policy-maker

Checklist: Policy Development Guiding Questions

General considerations for all policies:

- _____ Is the policy ethical? Does it align with the Board’s values, vision and mission?
- _____ Does the document employ gender-neutral and inclusive language?
- _____ Are key terms in the policy adequately defined?
- _____ Is the policy written in a manner that can be understood by a wide audience?
- _____ Is terminology consistent in the draft policy and across related policies?
- _____ What resources of time, people and budget will be needed to develop, implement and/or monitor this policy?
- _____ Does the draft policy follow the board policy template?

Planning Stages

- _____ Is a policy required, or is the issue better resolved through other means such as improved communication, an educational campaign, or a memo?
- _____ Are the resources, knowledge, and expertise available to develop a policy on this issue?
- _____ Will there be any training or professional learning requirements associated with the development, implementation or monitoring of this policy? If so, how will they be addressed?
- _____ Is there an existing policy with the same or a similar intent?
- _____ Have policies from other school boards been reviewed and compared?
- _____ Have plans been made on how the policy will be implemented and who will be responsible for implementing it?
- _____ Have plans been made on how the policy will be communicated to the school jurisdiction, community, constituents and any applicable external organizations?



Drafting and Reviewing the Policy

- _____ Is the purpose of the policy clearly established in the document?
- _____ Have related policies and procedures and other documents, like the jurisdiction's Education Plan, been reviewed to ensure the draft policy aligns with them?
- _____ If there are pre-existing policies that are interrelated or overlap, are appropriate references included to related policies and is it clear when each policy will apply?
- _____ Does the policy accurately reflect current practice?
- _____ Have applicable legislation (e.g. *Education Act*) and regulations been identified and reviewed to ensure that the draft policy is in alignment?
- _____ Is it clear to whom and what the policy applies?
- _____ Have all procedures been separated from the policy?
- _____ Have all references in the draft policy been verified as accurate and current?

Consultations

- _____ Have experts in the subject area been consulted?
- _____ Have all staff, community members, and stakeholders been identified who may be impacted by the terms of the draft policy?
- _____ Have stakeholders been consulted and had an opportunity to provide input and feedback on the draft policy?
- _____ Have consultations been considered and appropriate revisions made to the draft policy?

Policy Approval

- _____ Has the draft policy been presented to the board for approval?
- _____ If changes were determined to be necessary, have they been made?
- _____ If changes were required and have been made, has the policy been resubmitted to the board for approval?
- _____ Has the Board Policy Handbook been revised to include the new policy?

ADAPTED FROM: [University of Victoria, Policy Development and Review Checklist.](#)



G-TEC Policy Model

Governing Through Engagement and Collaboration

G-TEC Policy Model Deliverables

Board Policy Handbook



Admin Procedures Manual



Forms Directory



A G-TEC Board

- 1.Division Foundational Statements
- 2.Role of the Board
- 3.Role of the Trustee
- 4.Trustee Code of Conduct
- 5.Role of the Board Chair
- 6.Role of the Vice-Chair
- 7.Board Operations
- 8.Board Committees
- 9.Board Representatives
- 10.Policy Making
- 11.Board Delegation of Authority
- 12.Role of the Superintendent
- 13.Appeals and Hearings Regarding Student Matters
- 14.Hearings on Teacher Transfers
- 15.School Closure
- 16.Recruitment and Selection of Personnel
- 17.Student Transportation Services
- 18.Alternative Programs
- 19.Welcoming, Caring, Respectful, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments