

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 10, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Planning and Policy Committee

SUBJECT: Proposed Revision to JJ.BP – Advertising in Schools

ORIGINATOR: Victor Tanti, Director Communications

RESOURCE
STAFF: Michelle Gurney, Anne Sherwood

Recommendation

1. That revised Board Policy JJ.BP – Assisting Community Organizations be approved (Appendix I).
2. That current Board Policy JJ.BP – Advertising in Schools be rescinded.

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The current Board Policy JJ.BP – Advertising in Schools has been reviewed and proposed revisions are indicated in Appendix I. The name of the policy has been changed to more accurately reflect the content.

Community Organizations

No change is proposed to the intent of the current policy statement encouraging schools to assist community organizations in distributing information. However, it is recommended that the board policy on the distribution of materials be revised to address all materials including religious materials such as “Gideon Bibles” or other “Holy Books”, rather than grant permission within the policy to allow a specifically named external organization the exclusive right to distribute materials in district schools.

In keeping with current practice, decisions about the distribution of materials to students, parent and staff should rest with the principal. Advice and assistance on the distribution of sensitive materials is available to principals through Communications and Leadership Services.

Materials should be distributed at the discretion of the principal with consideration for the likely attitudes of the school community toward the material to be distributed. Principals are encouraged to seek prior written parental consent for the distribution of controversial material, such as Shrine Circus tickets, to students.

Canvassing in Schools

Minor modification to the statement on Canvassing in Schools is recommended to remove the specific delegation of authority to the superintendent of schools for school participation in community-sponsored charitable appeals. The board has a general delegation of authority statement (CHA.BP – Delegation of Authority) which delegates authority to the administration under the direction of the superintendent of schools to exercise powers not specifically reserved to the board by the *School Act*, board policy, or practice.

Background

January 24, 1961 a Board Policy regarding the presentation of bibles was introduced. Since this time, policy implementation has been adapted to meet the changing face of our community. For many years, the Gideons distributed bibles annually and preached to students about the way of the Lord. We later restricted their activity, stating they could only distribute the bibles during non-instructional time, that they could not preach and that they also had to provide a card for parents who didn't want their children to receive a bible; these particular children were to be excluded from the presentation.

In June 1994, two parents approached the district, one Jewish, the other a prominent human rights lawyer, who objected to the distribution of the bibles, and the way children who are excluded from the distribution are handled. The district was asked to review the policy.

In 1995, the administration proposed a compromise. The Gideons would be required to distribute a **permission** card, not an **exclusion** card to students, so that only those students whose parents have given written permission would receive a copy of the Youth Testament. This practice is still followed today. No class time is spent in discussion or distribution of the Testament.

Issues:

- The Gideons mandate is to distribute as many Bibles as possible; success is measured by the number of Bibles distributed. Not all parents respond to the permission card which greatly reduces the numbers of Bibles distributed to Grade 5 students in the district. The Gideons went along with Edmonton Public Schools change in distribution very reluctantly, as it does impact their ability to be successful.
- In 1995, the Gideons asked Edmonton Public Schools to reverse their decision to change the way the Testament was distributed. The Gideons argument is that students often don't take the permission cards home and that when they do not, they get complaints from parents. We have, however, continued to ask for the distribution of **permission** cards as opposed to **exclusion** cards.
- We receive a few parental complaints regarding our distribution policy each year. The Calgary Board of Education receives 1 or 2 phone calls a year, and the Elk Island School District has received no complaints regarding the distribution of the Testaments. Generally, these parents believe that the Testaments should not be distributed during "class time", and we explain that they are not. In addition, parents who have complained believe that if we distribute the Gideon Testament, that we should also distribute other

Holy Books (i.e., the Koran). We have explained to parents that we do not proactively seek the distribution of such materials. Although we do distribute brochures on matters such as church summer camps, we have not been approached by any other religious organizations wishing to distribute information to our students.

- Each year Edmonton Public Schools receives hundreds of requests to distribute information to our students, some of which could be perceived as controversial information (i.e., Shriners approach us to distribute ticket vouchers to the Shrine Circus).

What Other Districts Do:

The Calgary Board of Education does not have a policy regarding the distribution of Gideon Testaments; however, they do have procedures that speak to the distribution of all “Holy Books.” They are:

1. A representative of the religious community will contact individual elementary school principals in late September/early October to request a date for distribution.
2. Principals are asked to take into account the wishes of their parent community and to notify parents of the date and distribution process. Consent cards will be made available.
3. Principals are asked to use a procedure requesting that parents wishing to have their children receive a Holy Book advise the school.
4. The process should provide for distribution at the beginning or end of the school day or at the beginning or end of the noon hour to minimize the disruption of learning and teaching.
5. Although there is to be no "distribution ceremony" the principal may wish to introduce the representative who will then distribute the Holy Books.

Elk Island Public Schools follows similar procedures to the Calgary Board of Education. Again, they do not have a policy that speaks specifically to the distribution of the Gideon Testament, however they do have policies (Appendix II) related to religious exercises and the handling of controversial issues, similar to our district.

Appendix I: Revised Board Policy JJ.BP – Assisting Community Organizations

Appendix II: Elk Island School Board Policies

MG/VT

PROPOSED BOARD POLICY JJ.BP – ASSISTING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community Organizations

The Board encourages the district and schools to assist community organizations in the distribution of materials to students, parents and teachers at no cost to the district. Materials may be distributed at the discretion of the principal with consideration for the likely attitudes of the school community toward the material to be distributed. Principals are encouraged to seek prior written parental consent for the distribution of controversial or religious material to students.

Canvassing in Schools

The Board encourages the participation of schools in community-sponsored programs designed to enhance student understanding and appreciation of the role, purposes and activities of charitable organizations. Further, the Board encourages schools to participate in activities intended to assist individuals and groups in need.

~~The authority for school participation in such activities is delegated to the Superintendent of Schools.~~

School group participation in the collection of goods and funds is permitted: the canvassing for funds from individual students and staff on school premises is prohibited.

~~Presentation of Bibles~~

~~The Gideon Society is authorized to present a small bible (New Testament) to each Grade V pupil and a large bible for each classroom in the system.~~

ELK ISLAND SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Controversial Issues in Education: HNDC

The classroom study of controversial Issues prepares students to become responsible citizens; such study provides opportunities to develop student capacities to think clearly, to reason logically, to examine different points of view respectfully and open-mindedly and to reach sound judgements.

Guidelines:

1. Sensitivity on the part of students, teachers and other participants in examining controversial issues shall be exercised to ensure that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed, intimidated or degraded for positions which they hold on the issues.
2. Information regarding controversial issues should:
 - a) represent alternative points of view
 - b) appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities and educational needs of the students
 - c) meet the requirements of provincially prescribed and approved courses of study and educational programs
 - d) reflect local as well as provincial, national and international contexts
3. Controversial issues which have been anticipated by the teacher and those which may arise incidentally in the course of instruction, should be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry rather than advocacy and to teach students how to think rather than what to think.
4. The principal shall handle parental and student concerns in regard to controversial issues and resources with respect and sensitivity.

Revisions in June 1998

1. The teacher shall review all materials to be considered for use to ensure that they meet standards commonly accepted in the community.
2. The principal may provide permission for a student to be excused from the study of a particular controversial issue.

Religious Exercises HNB

Religious exercises may be used in the schools at the discretion of the Principal and upon the advice of the School Council.

Guidelines:

1. The use of religious exercises should reflect the school community.
2. Parents may choose to exempt their child from religious exercises.
3. A written request for non-participation must be signed by the parent or guardian.
4. The school shall handle parental concerns with regard to religious exercises with sensitivity and respect.

Revisions in June 1998

1. The written request for non-participation will allow for the student:
 - a) to leave the classroom or place where the exercise is taking place for the duration of the exercise
 - b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the exercise.