

I. FAITH PHILOSOPHY

WHEREAS:

This Faith Based School Policy (“Faith-based Policy”) shall apply to all aspects of the School’s operations in the School’s provision of faith-based education, programming and services.

Alberta’s School Act

- the best educational interests of the student are the paramount considerations in the exercise of any authority under the *School Act*;
- students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self;
- the Board of Directors of the Hillcrest Christian School Board (“Board”) establishes this Faith Policy in relation to all aspects of the School’s operations in its provision of faith-based education, including in relation to the Board’s obligation 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.

Parents’ Rights Respecting their Children’s Education

- parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children as reflected in the *School Act* preamble;
- sections 1(c) and 1(g) of *Alberta’s Bill of Rights* recognizes and declares that in Alberta there exists without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity or gender expression, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely the freedom of religion and the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children;
- the School’s students and parents have voluntarily selected an education infused with Christian beliefs and values;

Faith Based Independent Schools in Alberta

- the Government of Alberta recognizes that parents have the right to choose a private school for their children and has provided financial support for private schools since 1967;
(<https://education.alberta.ca/private-schools/private-schools-in-alberta/?searchMode=3>)

Faith Based Education at the School

- Hillcrest Christian School has operated a faith-based school with an emphasis on modeling Biblical community and character development since 1980;

Legal References:

- a) *Alberta School Act*, RSA 2000, c S-3: preamble, sections 2, 3, 16, 28
- b) *Alberta Bill of Rights*, RSA 2000, c A-14: preamble, sections 1 and 2
- c) *Alberta Human Rights Act*, RSA 2000, c A-25.5: sections 7, 8 and 11
- d) 2017 Bill 24, Third Session, 29th Legislature, 66 Elizabeth II (“Bill 24”)
- e) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), article 5
- f) *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, article 18(4) (which protects the rights of parents to guide their children’s religious upbringing)

- the School ensures the availability of a faith-based program of studies for students whose parents desire an educational setting which operates in accordance with its philosophy, beliefs, core values, vision, theological commitments, and ethical standards which are set out respectively in its mission statement, vision statement, and student code of conduct;
- Hillcrest Christian School is an intentional Christian community. This includes staff, parents and children who do not necessarily adhere to the Christian faith but believe that the values held within the faith-based School setting provide a healthy environment for their children.
- The School encourage both staff and students to attempt to live by the teachings of the Bible.
- The values and principles found within the Bible are the basis upon which the School offers its educational programming and are the core of the School's identity;
- the School's method of teaching Christianity aims to grant students the opportunity to better understand the Christian faith and learn to live it out in their daily lives;
- the School's belief in its religious obligation to teach Christianity is consistent with its organizational purpose and operation;

The School Commitment to providing a Safe, Caring, Welcoming and Safe Learning Environment

- the School is committed to providing a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment in keeping with the vision, mission, and faith-based foundation of the School;

II. Scope of Faith-based Policy

1. For further clarity, the content of this Faith-based Policy serves as the basis for the provision of the School's faith-based education as legislatively permitted by the *School Act*. It is intended that all aspects of the School's provision of educational programming shall be guided by, based upon and infused with the principles set out in this Faith-based Policy.

III. Principles Arising in the Context of Canadian Law

1. Consistent with its mission and vision, the Board is committed to a safe, caring, respectful, inclusive, equitable, and welcoming learning and teaching environment for all students. This environment shall be one that recognizes and respects student diversity, equity of learning opportunity for all students, respect for human rights, and that fosters a sense of belonging of all students within a respectful school community.
2. The School recognizes that as a religious school, the application of legislation involving human rights may be a delicate exercise and that the School may be required to exercise some discretion in its navigation of these potentially complex matters.
3. This Policy does not define one set of human needs as greater than another. This Policy supports and respects the individuality of all students and aims create a positive and supportive environment focused on providing the best possible learning opportunity for each student.

Legal References:

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- a) *Alberta School Act*, RSA 2000, c S-3: preamble, sections 2, 3, 16, 28
 - b) *Alberta Bill of Rights*, RSA 2000, c A-14: preamble, sections 1 and 2
 - c) *Alberta Human Rights Act*, RSA 2000, c A-25.5: sections 7, 8 and 11
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 - e) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), article 5
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4. The School believes that all students have the right to:
 - a) be treated fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect;
 - b) have matters of confidentiality dealt with in a respectful and careful manner;
 - c) freedom of conscience, expression, and association;
 - d) be welcomed in a positive, and respectful manner by all school personnel;
 - e) have access to appropriate supports, services, and protections;
 - f) have avenues of recourse (without fear of reprisal) available to them when they are victims of harassment, intimidation, bullying, and/or violence.
5. The School reserves the right to argue that the School, parents and students have a freedom of religion and that none of these entities may be forced in law to adhere to or refrain from a particular set of reasonably held religious beliefs or the individual's ability to act in accordance with his or her religious practice or belief.
6. *Alberta's Bill of Rights*, RSA 2000, c. A-14:
 - a) recognizes and declares that in Alberta there exist without discrimination the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association and the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children;
 - b) states that every law of Alberta shall, unless it is expressly declared by an Act of the Legislature that it operates notwithstanding the Alberta Bill of Rights, be so construed and applied as not to abrogate, abridge or infringe or to authorize the abrogation, abridgment or infringement of any of the rights or freedoms herein recognized and declared.
7. As noted in section 2 of the *School Act*, the exercise of any right or the receipt of any benefit under this Act is subject to those limitations that are reasonable in each circumstance under which the right is being exercised or the benefit is being received.
8. As noted in sections 3(1) and (2) of the *School Act*:
 - a) All education programs offered and instructional materials used in schools must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans;
 - b) For greater certainty, education programs and instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, religious intolerance or persecution, social change through violent action or disobedience of laws.
9. Any limitation which is not reasonable and justifiable in the circumstances could have the effect of abrogating, abridging, or infringing upon the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children.
10. When addressing matters of human rights, whether in a classroom, club or activity setting, the Board, principal, teachers and other staff will act reasonably in the best interests of the student. In

Legal References:

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 - c) *Alberta Human Rights Act*, RSA 2000, c A-25.5: sections 7, 8 and 11
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keeping with established jurisprudence, the school, the principal, teachers and other staff are free to act and communicate the school's animating faith and/or values in a respectful manner, including (but not limited to) the following:

- a) The School's teachers and staff may describe and explain the school's faith and/or value community beliefs, doctrines and ethical beliefs from the faith/perspective, and need not be required to adopt a neutral position;
- b) The School's teachers and staff will maintain a respectful tone of debate — both by conveying their own contributions in a respectful way, and by ensuring dialogue proceeds in accordance with respect, tolerance and understanding for those who hold different beliefs and practices;
- d) Where the context of the classroom discussion requires it, the School's teachers may identify the School community's animating beliefs and/or values beliefs, why the School community follows those beliefs and/or values.

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