

Expressing Deep Concerns with the Proposed Alberta K-6 Curriculum

Court of Action: Northern Spirit and Chinook Winds Regional Councils

1. What is the issue?

Along with many Albertans, the Being Good Relations Network has deep concerns with the March 2021 draft K-6 Social Studies curriculum for Alberta, specifically with the removal or reframing of the history and impacts of colonization, including the “Indian Residential School” system, and the lack of current contributions of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples. The Network would like the Regional Council and its members to express this concern publicly to the government of Alberta.

2. Why is this issue important?

The recent draft K-6 Alberta curriculum is in direct violation of a promise the Alberta Government made on March 27, 2014, at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event in Edmonton. That promise included:

1. Mandatory content for all Alberta students on residential schools and treaties,
2. Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum development standards and,
3. Support for professional learning opportunities for teachers.

In June 2016, this promise was incorporated into the Joint Commitment to Action signed by representatives of the Government of Alberta, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and five Alberta education stakeholder organizations as part of an enduring commitment to respond to the Calls to Action from the TRC.

We believe the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples; the Treaties of which we are all a part; and the 1986 Apology, among others, call the church to take a stand against the Social Studies curriculum as proposed.

Indigenous advocates and knowledge keepers, and their non-Indigenous allies, struggled to change the curriculum even before the TRC. The changes made were the result of years of consultation, expertise and effort, in the belief that, in the words of Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, “Education is what got us here and education is what will get us out.”

The curriculum as proposed threatens, undermines, or removes meaningful mandatory and age-appropriate content through both omission and very problematic additions. Among a very few examples:

The entire Social Studies curriculum features a bias toward the perceived positives from a ‘settler’ viewpoint, with little mention of the many negative impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples. The smallpox epidemic which wiped out so many Indigenous people and communities is not mentioned. In the Grade 6 curriculum there is a very heavy emphasis on American history, while the Indian Act is not featured. Also in Grade 6, when world religions are studied, there is no mention of Indigenous spirituality. Current Indigenous lifeways and issues are not included.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

1. That Northern Spirit Regional Council, through its Executive send a public letter to the government of Alberta, with a copy to Yellowknife United Church, expressing its grave concerns with the K-6

Social Studies curriculum as proposed, and deep disappointment with the failure to live up to the Joint Commitment to Action (details from background info); and

2. That the Regional Council encourage communities of faith and the people of the Regional Council to send their own letters of concern.

Budget implications: Minimal. Some staff time will be needed to prepare and send the letter and related resources.

Originating Group: Being Good Relations Network, Northern Spirit and Chinook Winds Regional Councils.

Contact: Erin Hickman sends this proposal on behalf of the network in Northern Spirit, 2021.

Regional Council Action: approved by Northern Spirit Regional Council on May 6, 2021.