## **Board of Education of School District No. 34 (Abbotsford)**

## **Social Justice 12 Curriculum Response**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the draft Social Justice 12 IRP. Our District Education Committee reviewed the IRP and prepared a response that was then reviewed by our District Curriculum team for further feedback. Because of the process our District used to review the IRP, our response will be more narrative in nature and reflect larger themes of concern expressed by all the reviewers.

## **Concerns and Observations**

An immediate observation by our District reviewers was that the course appears to be more suited for university students because of the level of knowledge and understanding required in order to have meaningful discussions about the issues and topics in the Social Justice 12 course. When compared to university sociology course syllabuses it would appear that Social Justice 12 is more suited for second or third year sociology students and it was noted that none of the sociology definitions or basic sociological understandings required to discuss and study complex issues are included in the Social Justice course.

The review team also felt that there were too many learning outcomes for a four credit course. Many of the social issues identified in the course have to be well researched and presented in a balanced manner that will promote a non threatening learning environment in which teachers and students will be able to discuss topics in which there may be conflicting rights and beliefs. Because of the danger of personal bias, the lack of background knowledge and training in sociology our recommendation would be to identify specific qualifications for those teaching this course. Most teachers simply do not have the training or expertise to teach a course that requires more than just a conversational knowledge of the Freedom of Information and Personal Privacy Act, Human Rights Code, Employment Standards Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to mention just a few. Without a significant knowledge and understanding of the legal, historical and social parameters around many of the topics to be studied there is a danger students may become more biased and less tolerant of opposing beliefs due to misinformation. It will take a great deal of skill, training and wisdom to ensure that everyone is honoured and respected when differing views and beliefs emerge from such a study/course.

Finding appropriate resources for Social Justice 12 was another area of concern for the reviewers. Many of the issues and topics are very sensitive and encroach on areas of family values, beliefs and practices. Selecting materials and resources that give a balanced perspective will be difficult. Some resources and related discussions may leave students feeling alienated or threatened rather than feeling accepted and respected for their opinions and perspectives.

The role of families and parents was another area that was considered to be important by our team. Many of the topics and issues to be discussed in this course are sensitive and, therefore, it is imperative that the teacher is sensitive to family culture, values, beliefs and practices. It should be clearly stated in the IRP's that the teacher has an obligation to ensure that they do not undermine the religious or moral beliefs and cultural practices or norms of families whose children are in their classrooms. While this may well be an underlying premise of the course, it needs to be clearly articulated and communicated to parents and students that their rights, freedoms and values will be respected.

The reviewers also expressed a concern that Social Justice 12 may leave the impression that having strong religious beliefs could have a negative affect on social justice issues. If not presented well, students could be left with the impression that their family values and religious beliefs are in conflict with some social justice issues. Many people are being discriminated throughout the world because of their religious beliefs and convictions and yet this course does not appear to adequately address or highlight these social justice concerns. Historically, many faith based organizations have gained international recognition for their humanitarian aid, social programs and efforts to oppose human rights violations throughout the world. This is not adequately reflected in the Social Justice 12 draft curriculum.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our review of the draft Social Justice 12 IRP. We look forward to your response and careful consideration of our concerns and observations.

Joanne Field Board Chair School District No. 34 (Abbotsford)