



FEB 23 1998

DIRECTORS, DIVISIONAL EDUCATION COUNCILS
SUPERINTENDENTS, DISTRICT EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

Religious Instruction in Public Schools

Recently, a concern has been raised that some schools may be providing religious instruction that is in contravention of the Education Act. To ensure that all Divisional Education Councils, District Education Authorities and School Principals fully understand the section of the Act that deals with religious instruction, the following direction for interpreting and applying the Act in NWT public schools is provided.

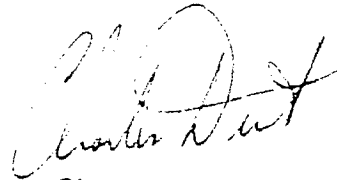
During the regular school day ... "instruction and discussion in spiritual values or beliefs in a manner that is respectful of the spiritual values or beliefs of all the students" may be offered as part of the education program (*Education Act - Section 77 [2]*). Such a course involving discussions of various beliefs, offered as part of the education program, would have to be taught by a certified teacher. The teacher could bring in resource people from various beliefs for discussion if he or she wishes. The teacher will be responsible for maintaining an attitude in the class that is ... "Respectful of the spiritual values or beliefs of all the students."

Religious exercises and instruction in a specific religion may not be offered in public schools in the Northwest Territories during regular school hours. The only exception to this is Section 77 [3] of the Education Act, which allows Public Denominational Schools to offer religious instruction.

If a community wishes to offer religious instruction in a particular religion they may offer it as a local program, outside of the regular school hours. Such a program could be offered in the school after the close of the regular school program and could be taught by members of the religious community. It would not form part of the school program, and thus students would not be required to attend.

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All Directors/Superintendents of Education should review the implementation of Section 77 of the Education Act, with all schools and DEA's in their jurisdiction, to ensure that there is compliance with the spirit and intent of the Act.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Dent". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Charles Dent

Attachment

- c. Chairpersons, Divisional Education Councils
Chairpersons, District Education Authorities

EDUCATION ACT: SECTION 77 - Spirituality and Religion

- (1) A teacher may make a statement about spiritual or religious values or beliefs if the statement is required to explain an aspect of a subject or a world view and is made in a manner that is respectful of the spiritual or religious values or beliefs of all the students.
- (2) A District Education Authority may, in accordance with the directions of the Minister, provide for instruction and discussion in spiritual values or beliefs in a manner that is respectful of the spiritual values or beliefs of all the students.
- (3) A public denominational school may provide religious instruction and
 - (a) may conduct religious exercises
 - (i) in a manner that reflects the religious values of the majority of the ratepayers who petitioned the Minister in accordance with section 97 for the establishment of the public denominational school,
 - (ii) in accordance with the directions of the Minister; and
 - (b) the religious instruction shall be provided or conducted in a manner that is respectful of the spiritual or religious values of all the students.