

Safe and Caring Schools Initiative

The Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) Initiative, funded by the provincial government, was introduced throughout Alberta in 1996 in response to a perception that standards of student conduct were declining and violence in schools was increasing. The goal was to provide a collaborative and integrated approach to reducing violence in schools.

Although the conduct of a small minority of students is challenging educators and parents, Alberta schools continue to be a safe place for the vast majority. Therefore, from its inception, the SACS Initiative has concentrated on providing information and resources that address the needs of students whose behaviour is negatively affecting learning and teaching environments. Rather than simply identifying what is wrong with our schools or focusing on the number of violent incidents, various SACS projects work toward positive outcomes.

Safe and Caring Schools is a comprehensive framework that helps schools develop their capacity to provide safe and caring environments by promoting respectful and responsible behaviour.

The mission of SACS is to encourage and assist members of the school community in developing the knowledge, skills and supports to ensure that all schools are safe and caring. The goals are to:

- identify and promote effective practices, programs and policies to prevent, respond to and correct any behaviour that is disruptive to teaching and learning
- ensure that all schools are safe and caring
- develop strategies and programs for prevention, intervention and continuous evaluation
- have schools play a leadership role because of their tremendous potential to positively influence the lives of young people
- promote the development of responsible, caring and respectful members of a democratic society
- combine the efforts of government, school boards, schools, students, parents, police and community members to ensure that all Alberta school staff are safe and caring as they strive toward academic excellence
- provide opportunities for active participation by all partners to ensure that schools and communities are safe and caring.

Section 45(8) of the Alberta *School Act* places a specific duty on school boards to ensure that all students are provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviour. School boards are required to report efforts and activities undertaken to ensure that their schools are safe and caring.

Several projects have emerged as Alberta educators have worked toward building and sustaining safe and caring schools.

Academic research

The faculties of education at the universities of Alberta, Calgary and Lethbridge have published a number of articles on their collaborative research into the social, psychological, historical and personal dimensions of serious disruptive behaviour and violence in Alberta schools. The results of this research and its implications for practice at the school level have been published in *Building Foundations for Safe and Caring Schools: Research on Disruptive Behaviour and Violence* (1999) by Grace Malicky, Bonnie Shapiro and Kas Mazurek.

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has developed research-based bullying and violence prevention programs and resources for students, teachers and parents.

These programs and resources focus on:

- living respectfully/building a safe and caring classroom (developing positive classroom climate and an understanding of and commitment to respect and responsibility)
- developing self-esteem (exploring individual strengths and weaknesses, and our relationships with others)
- respecting diversity and preventing prejudice (learning about and appreciating multiple perspectives)
- managing anger, and dealing with bullying and harassment (addressing bullying and anger in self and others)
- resolving conflicts peacefully/working it out together (using skills and courteous behaviour to resolve conflicts and solve problems).

In 2004, the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project was incorporated as The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SACSC). The society, which has charitable status, is governed by a board of directors with representation from the Alberta Schools Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta Teachers' Association, parents, police services, Aboriginal communities, universities and service clubs. There are also a number of members at large.

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities seeks to prevent bullying and violence by educating children and youth and the adults in their lives about promoting positive social interaction among all human beings. The programs of this nonprofit organization aim to prevent violence and bullying in schools and communities through character education, conflict-management training and building respect for diversity. By helping young people learn from their mistakes and understand why certain behaviour is inappropriate, these programs promote a problem-solving approach to discipline that encourages positive social behaviour.

SACSC uses a comprehensive approach that includes components for students, teachers, support staff, parents and other members of the community. The society has no religious affiliations. The values promoted through SACSC character education, such as respect, responsibility, inclusiveness, caring and compassion, are part of all cultural and religious traditions.

SACSC curriculum resources for early childhood to Grade 12 integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the five safe and caring topics into all grades and across subject areas. The Kindergarten to Grade 6 resource, *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum*, includes sample learning activities, tips for teachers and learning strategies. The learning activities can be used across subject areas and the resource is authorized for use in teaching the Kindergarten to Grade 6 health and life skills program. These resources are available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre.

The *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum* resource for secondary schools integrates violence prevention, and safe and caring skills and attitudes across the subject areas. Unit and lesson plans, as well as instructional strategies, are available on the SACSC Web site, www.sacsc.ca.

A SACSC professional development program helps teachers integrate safe and caring principles into their teaching practice by using three approaches:

- modelling safe and caring behavior in teacher–student relationships and discipline practices
- integrating safe and caring knowledge, skills and attitudes into prescribed curriculum by linking outcomes
- using instructional methods that help students develop safe and caring knowledge, skills and attitudes through active classroom participation.

The professional development program includes a number of workshops for teachers and other school staff. In addition, teachers can participate in Web-based micro-workshops on topics such as School Climate, Responding to Inappropriate Behaviour and Brain Research. Curriculum, school leadership and facilitator training programs are also offered. Post-secondary credit is available for completion of these programs.



A student survey titled *Supporting a Safe and Caring School: What Students Say* helps assess school climate and identify the amount of bullying in the school. The survey instrument is available on the SACSC Web site. It is also included in Appendix A (*Tools 8A, 8B and 8C*).

Twenty-eight research-based resource booklets for teachers, students and parents are currently available from SACSC. They address topics such as bullying, media violence, peer support, diversity issues, brain research and complexity theory. Scripts for student assemblies are available for school administrators who are introducing “safe and caring” topics. A complete list of these resources is available on the SACSC Web site.

SACSC has also developed a series of workshops for parents and other adults in the community to help them become better role models of safe and caring behaviour, and to help parents reinforce what their children are learning through the SACSC resources and other school programs. The series includes 25 hours of instruction based on the five safe and caring school topics. A certificate and post-secondary credit is available for completion of the workshop series. Additional post-secondary credit is available for completion of the facilitator training program, which prepares instructors to deliver the workshop series in their communities.

Alberta Education resources

Alberta Education has developed resources to help school staff collaborate with parents and community members to plan and implement effective policies, programs and practices that are legally, educationally and professionally sound. The resources are:

- *Supporting Safe, Secure and Caring Schools in Alberta* (1999)
- *Supporting the Social Dimension: A Resource Guide for Teachers, Grades 7–12* (2002)
- *Working Together for Safe and Caring Schools, Grades 7–12: Resource Manual for Students, Staff and Parents* (2003).

Contact information

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Related Web sites

Safe and Caring Schools

<https://education.alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools/>

Creating Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments

<http://resources.safeandcaring.ca/resource-safe/>

Related publications

Alberta Learning. *Supporting Safe, Secure and Caring Schools in Alberta*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 1999.

Alberta Learning. *Supporting the Social Dimension: A Resource Guide for Teachers, Grades 7–12*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2002.

Alberta Learning. *Working Together for Safe and Caring Schools, Grades 7–12: Resource Manual for Students, Staff and Parents*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2003.

Alberta Teachers' Association. *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum: Resources for Integration (K–6)*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Teachers' Association's Safe and Caring Schools Project, 1998.