ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

Students	Student Search and Seizure	STU #14

Revised: **November 2026**

Background

Rooted in our Catholic belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools (CTR) is committed to safe and caring schools that uphold the dignity, privacy, and well-being of every student. Guided by Gospel values of justice, compassion, and respect, CTR balances its responsibility to safeguard the school community with the rights of individual students. Any search or seizure shall be undertaken with fairness, sound judgment, and the least intrusion reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Section 197(f) of the Alberta Education Act (Act) requires the principal to maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the Board of Trustees of CTR (Board). Section 196(1)(f) of the Act requires a teacher to maintain, under the direction of the principal, order and discipline among students while they are in the school or on the school grounds and while they are attending or participating in activities sponsored or approved by the Board.

These statutory responsibilities support reasonable searches of students, personal belongings, and school-assigned storage in appropriate circumstances. A school search must have a lawful school purpose, reasonable grounds, and a manner and scope proportionate to the circumstances.

Procedures

Before authorizing a student search, the principal or designate shall assess the grounds for the search, its educational or safety purpose, the proposed scope, the student's privacy and dignity, and whether a less intrusive response is sufficient. The principal or designate shall also consider whether immediate police assistance is necessary. School staff shall not conduct searches for the purpose of gathering evidence on behalf of police.

General Principles

1. Except where immediate action is reasonably necessary to address a serious and imminent safety threat, a search of a student or the student's belongings shall be authorized and ordinarily conducted by the principal or designate. Staff responding to an emergency shall use the least intrusive protective action reasonably necessary and promptly notify administration.

2. In an ordinary school disciplinary search, there must be reasonable grounds to believe that a school rule has been or is being breached, school safety compromised, and that evidence of the breach will be found in the place or on the person to be searched.

3. Staff may first consider a voluntary request to produce an item where appropriate, while recognizing that consent does not replace the need for a lawful and reasonable school purpose.

Police Involvement and Coordination

1. Call 9-1-1 without delay where there is an immediate threat of serious harm, an apparent weapon presenting danger, or another emergency requiring police response. For serious non-emergency incidents, the principal shall promptly consult the Superintendent or designate to determine whether referral to police is appropriate, having regard to safety, the nature of the incident, and applicable reporting duties. Potential matters may include serious assaults, sexual violence, credible threats, weapons, robbery or extortion, trafficking, hate-motivated violence, and significant property damage.

2. Where police are involved, the principal shall notify the Superintendent or designate promptly and coordinate with police so that school actions do not unnecessarily interfere with a criminal investigation. The school shall continue to address immediate safety, supervision, student support, and any necessary protective measures. Discretionary questioning or searches that could compromise a police investigation shall be paused pending consultation. Parents or guardians shall ordinarily be informed as soon as reasonably possible, subject to lawful restrictions and student safety considerations. School disciplinary processes may proceed when appropriate, and independently of police processes.

3. Police access, questioning, searches, and seizures on school property are governed by applicable law. A warrant, lawful arrest authority, or an urgent circumstance may provide a legal basis in some cases; no single category of suspected offence automatically confers an unrestricted right to search school premises. A principal should seek clarification of the legal basis when it is safe and practical to do so, should not obstruct lawful police action, and shall notify the Superintendent or designate.

4. Parental consent is not a blanket legal prerequisite for every lawful police investigation. Administrators shall not purport to authorize or prohibit police action beyond the school's legal role. Where police seek to question a student, the principal shall seek timely guidance from the Superintendent or designate and address parental notification procedures provided in CTR Administrative Procedure GEN #11 - Cooperating with Local Law Enforcement or Child Family Services.

Searches of Students and Personal Belongings

1. In an ordinary school search, the principal or designate must have reasonable grounds to believe a school rule has been or is being violated and that relevant evidence will be found in the particular location searched. The search shall not extend beyond what is reasonably necessary. Where a weapon, a suspected illegal substance, or another serious safety concern is identified, the principal shall promptly contact the Superintendent or designate to determine safe handling, notification, and next steps.

2. Searches shall be carried out discreetly and in private where reasonably possible, by appropriate personnel, in a manner sensitive to the student's dignity, as is reasonably possible. The principal shall consider who is best suited to conduct the search and will do so in the least intrusive manner possible.

3. Except where necessary to respond to an imminent safety threat, searches shall be conducted without intentionally touching the student's person. Instead, staff conducting a search may ask the student to:
   3.1. Empty, display, or turn pockets inside-out;
   3.2. Raise pant legs to allow for inspection of socks and ankles;
   3.3. Remove shoes and, where reasonably necessary, socks;
   3.4. Remove jackets, sweaters, hoodies, or other outer clothing items, provided the student remains appropriately clothed beneath the items being removed;
   3.5. Empty and open backpacks, purses, bags, and other personal belongings, including opening pockets within these items, pouches, and compartments to allow for inspection.

4. A second adult shall ordinarily witness a search. If an immediate threat makes this impracticable, the principal shall document the reason and identify all persons involved. Wherever practicable, searches of lockers, desks, bags, and other belongings shall occur in the student's presence, without unnecessarily exposing personal information about the student or others.

5. The principal or designate shall prepare a factual, timely record of the decision to search and the manner in which the search occurred, including:
   5.1. The circumstances giving rise to the search, including the date, time, and place of the incident and search;
   5.2. The source and assessed reliability of information supporting the search;
   5.3. The principal or designate authorizing the search and the staff and student present;
   5.4. The identity of adult witnesses to the search and any relevant witnesses to the underlying concern;
   5.5. The nature and timing of any police involvement;
   5.6. Parent, guardian, or independent-student notification, including the time of contact or reason for any delay;
   5.7. The grounds for the search, the item sought, the locations examined, any refusal, the search method, and any less intrusive measures considered;
   5.8. The outcome, property seized, chain of custody, disposition of property, and any follow-up or student support.

6. All records shall be collected, accessed, used, stored, disclosed, and disposed of in accordance with the Protection of Privacy Act (POPA), the Access to Information Act where applicable, and CTR's approved records retention schedule. Where personal information is used to make a decision directly affecting an individual, POPA section 6 ordinarily requires student investigations for seven years after their anticipated graduation date; a longer retention period may be required by the division schedule, a complaint, appeal, investigation, or legal hold.

7. Seized items shall be handled safely, recorded, secured against unauthorized access, and transferred or returned only through an appropriate documented process. Staff shall not unnecessarily handle suspected hazardous items or substances and shall consult police and the Superintendent or designate where criminal evidence, weapons, or suspected illegal substances are involved. If police decline to accept an item, the principal shall seek direction on lawful retention, return, or disposal. No property shall be automatically destroyed simply because it is labelled contraband; the disposition must be lawful, authorized, and documented.

Locker and School-Owned Storage Searches

1. Lockers and other assigned storage spaces are CTR property. Routine inspections for maintenance, sanitation, or physical safety may occur in accordance with communicated school expectations and shall not be used as a pretext for an unrelated investigative search. A targeted search for suspected student misconduct or of the personal contents of a locker shall meet the reasonable-grounds and proportionality requirements of this procedure.

2. Whenever practical, the student shall be present for an investigative locker or desk search. A second adult shall ordinarily witness the search, and the purpose, scope, and outcome shall be documented.

3. School ownership of a locker or desk does not eliminate students' reasonable privacy interests in personal items stored there.

Electronic Devices

1. Confiscating or temporarily securing a cellphone or other electronic device under school rules does not, by itself, authorize accessing its messages, photographs, applications, files, accounts, or other private digital content. When an electronic device is confiscated by a staff member, the staff member may ask the student to first fully power down the device if the staff members does not require access to the phone.

2. Before accessing digital content, the principal shall consult the Superintendent or designate and, where appropriate, legal or privacy staff to assess the lawful basis, necessity, proportionality, and the information strictly relevant to the safety concern or school concern. Access to private accounts or passwords shall not be demanded as a routine investigative step.

3. Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm or suspected illegal activity, staff shall prioritize protective action and police assistance over an intrusive device search. If reports of illegal or illicit material on an electronic device are brought to the attention of school staff, the principal or designate will contact the Superintendent or designate for direction. Staff should take measures to avoid viewing illegal or illicit content on student phones. Devices held pending direction by the police shall be secured and handled in accordance with privacy and property-management requirements.

Refusal, Communication, and Review

1. If a student declines to cooperate with a search, staff shall not interpret refusal as automatic authorization for physical force or a more intrusive search. The principal shall reassess the risk, arrange appropriate supervision, consider less intrusive measures, and obtain assistance from the Superintendent or designate, or emergency services.

2. Parents or guardians shall ordinarily be informed as soon as reasonably practicable following a search of a student's person or personal belongings, or seizure of significant property. Notification may be delayed where required by law, student safety, or a properly coordinated police investigation. The communication and reasons for any delay shall be documented. Communication regarding an independent student shall follow applicable law.

Legislative and Administrative References

- Alberta Education Act, SA 2012, c E-0.3, particularly sections 31, 33, 196(1)(f), and 197(f) (as amended and in force).
- Alberta Protection of Privacy Act, especially section 6; Access to Information Act, where applicable.
- CTR Administrative Procedures as follows: STU #01 - Student Conduct and Discipline Process; STU #02 - Suspension and Expulsion; GEN #11 - Cooperating with Local Law Enforcement or Child Family Services; STU #18 - Safety-Risk Assessment; STU #19 - Student Records; STU #39 - Personal Mobile Devices and Social Media; GEN #17 - Emergency Preparedness and Response.