



TITLE: RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Date Issued: 20 June 2000
Last Revised: 12 April 2011
Authorization: Board: 26 March 2000

1.0 OBJECTIVE

To acknowledge and to respect each individual's right to follow or not to follow religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices, free from discriminatory or harassing behaviours, and to take all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations for individuals in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (the "District") community.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

In this policy,

- 2.1 **Accommodation** means an adjustment made to policies, programs, guidelines, or practices, including adjustments to physical settings and various types of criteria, that enables individuals to benefit from and take part in the provision of services equally and to participate equally and perform to the best of their ability in the workplace or an educational setting. Accommodations are provided so that individuals are not disadvantaged or discriminated against on the basis of the prohibited grounds of discrimination identified in the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (the "Code") or other similar grounds.
- 2.2 **Creed** means a professed system and confession of faith, including both beliefs and observances of worship. The existence of religious beliefs and practices are both necessary and sufficient to the meaning of creed, if the beliefs and practices are sincerely held and/or observed.
- 2.3 **Duty to Accommodate** means an obligation that arises when requirements, factors, or qualifications, which are imposed in good faith, have an adverse impact on, or provide an unfair preference for, a group of persons based on a protected ground under the *Code*. The duty to accommodate must be provided to the point of undue hardship.
- 2.4 **School Community** is composed of students, parents/guardians of the students, trustees, staff, contractors and service providers, volunteers and community members.

- 2.5 **Undue Hardship** refers to the legal threshold or limit of the District's capacity to accommodate based on an objective assessment of costs, outside sources of funding (if any), and health and safety considerations.

3.0 POLICY

- 1.1 The District is committed to identifying, addressing and preventing discrimination and harassment within its school community based on the enumerated grounds set out in the *Code*, including creed. The District supports freedom of religion and an individual's right to manifest their religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices.

The right to exercise freedom of religion, however, is not absolute. The District shall limit practices or behaviour in its learning and workplace environment which may put public safety, health, or the human rights and freedoms of others at risk. As well, the District shall limit practices or behaviours in its schools that are in violation of other District policies or procedures. These decisions shall be made in accordance with the principles of the *Code*.

- 1.2 The District recognizes and values the religious diversity within its community.
- 1.3 The District is committed to providing a safe, respectful, positive and inclusive environment for all, identifying and addressing all forms of discrimination or harassing behaviours based on religion, and to fostering religious and cultural understanding.
- 1.4 The District acknowledges that freedom of religion is an individual right and a collective responsibility and is committed to working with the community it serves to foster an inclusive environment that promotes acceptance and protects religious freedom for all individuals within the school community.
- 1.5 The District is committed to taking all reasonable steps to ensure freedom of religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices consistent with the *Human Rights Code*.
- 1.6 The District is committed to encouraging students and families to help staff to understand their religious and spiritual needs and to work with the District and its schools to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations.
- 1.7 The District is committed to seeking advice from representatives from various religious and spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices within the District's jurisdiction to enhance understanding of their religious and spiritual needs and to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations.
- 1.8 The District recognizes that for many students and staff there may be areas where their religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices may result in a request for accommodation on the part of a school or the District. These areas include, but are not limited to:
- a) School opening and closing exercises;
 - b) Leave of absence for religious holy days;

- c) Prayer;
- d) Dietary requirements;
- e) Fasting;
- f) Religious dress;
- g) Modesty requirements in physical education; and
- h) Participation in daily activities and Ontario curricula.

4.0 SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

- 4.1 The District shall take all reasonable steps to provide accommodation to individual members of a religious or spiritual group to facilitate their religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices:
 - a) by applying the *Code's* criteria of undue hardship;
 - b) in accordance with the District's ability to fulfill its duties under the District's policies and the *Education Act*; and
 - c) in accordance with the principles of equity, respect and inclusion.
- 4.2 The District shall inform students and staff of their right to request accommodation for religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices.
- 4.3 The District shall establish a mechanism to address accommodation requests.
- 4.4 The District shall make every effort to ensure that school and district-wide examinations and tests are not scheduled on holy days. In an attempt to avoid major scheduling problems, each religious or spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices is restricted to a maximum of three instructional days (in addition to statutory holidays).
- 4.5 The District shall consult with members of the multiple faith communities to implement this policy.
- 4.6 The District shall establish a process for the timely and fair resolution of concerns raised by students and staff members who feel that discrimination based on religion has occurred.
- 4.7 It is recognized that revisions and additions to Board Policy P.086.CUR: Religious Accommodation may be required as cultural and faith demographics evolve in the City of Ottawa.

5.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15)
The Ontario Human Rights Code (The Code)

The Education Act

PPM No 108, "Opening or Closing Exercises in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools"
R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 298, "Operation of School-General" s 27-29, under the heading
"Religion in Schools"

PPM No. 119, "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in
Ontario Schools".

Ontario Curriculum Policy Documents

Board Policy P.062 SO: School Opening and Closing Exercises

Board Policy P.098.CUR: Equity and Inclusive Education

Board Procedure P.618.CUR: Equity and Inclusive Education

Board Procedure PR.586.CUR: Religious Accommodation