



Human Resources

Guideline on Multifaith Accommodations

April 2011



KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Educating for success

General Guidelines and Procedures for Religious Accommodation

A. Introduction

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB) values the dignity and humanity of

B1: Accommodation Based on Request

The KPRDSB will take reasonable steps to provide accommodation to individual members of a religious group who state that the Board's operations or requirements interfere with their ability to exercise their religious beliefs and practices. The Board will balance its decision to accommodate on several factors, such as undue hardship, including: the cost of the accommodation to the Board, health and safety risks to the person requesting accommodation and to others, and the effect of accommodation on the Board's ability to fulfill its duties under Board policies and the *Education Act*.

B2: Unresolved Requests

Despite the Board's commitment to accommodate, an individual may feel that discrimination based on religion has occurred. The Board will, through the appropriate policies and procedures (see above for key policy references), take reasonable steps to address the unresolved issues raised by the affected person.

C. Definitions

C1: Accommodation

In keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Code, accommodation can be understood as an "obligation to meet the special needs of individuals and groups protected by the Code, unless meeting such needs would create undue hardship. For a blind employee, accommodation could mean providing a voice synthesizer on a computer; for other protected groups, it could mean altering a dress code or changing shift work to accommodate employees' individual religious practices." (Definitions and Glossary, Appendix A)

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Policy Guidelines on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances* defines accommodation as a duty corresponding to the right to be free from discrimination. It takes as its level of duty individuals, groups protected by the

D. Areas of Accommodation

For many students and staff within KPRDSB, there are a number of areas where the practice of their religion will result in a request for accommodation on the part of the school and/or the Board. These areas may include the following:

- Observation of major religious holy days and celebrations
- School opening or closing exercises
- Prayer
- Dietary requirements
- Fasting
- Religious attire
- Modesty requirements in Physical Education
- Participation in daily activities and curriculum

When concerns related to beliefs and practices arise in schools, collaboration among school, student, family, and religious community is often needed in order to develop appropriate accommodations. Building trust and mutual respect is an important aspect of accommodation, and it is the role of administrators and teachers to ensure fairness and respect for the diverse religious beliefs and practices of students and staff in the school system. However, school administrators and teachers should not be placed in the position of monitoring a child's compliance with a religious obligation, and enfo

Staff

The person requesting the leave should advise their supervisor at the beginning of the school year. If notice in September is not feasible, the person should make the request as early as possible. The absence of employees due to religious observances should be granted as determined by appropriate Board policies and collective agreements.

Students

Students are required to present a written notice from their parents/guardians/caregivers, specifying the religious holy days in which they will be absent from school. This notice should be made enough in advance (preferably at the beginning of the school year) to ensure that scheduling for major evaluations (e.g., tests, assignments, examinations) takes the holy days into consideration.

Student handbooks, parent newsletters, and school announcements should include information about religious holy days procedures.

Schools must make every reasonable effort to be aware of the religious observances of their staff, students, and community when planning special school activities; examination schedules, school concerts, parent interview dates, field trips, and other events.

In the case of an absence for religious holy day reasons, major tests or exams should be rescheduled for the student.

E2: Opening and Closing Exercises

Procedures

If a student or parent/guardian objects to all or part of opening or closing exercises due to religious beliefs, the pupil will be exempted and given the option not to participate and to remain in class or in an agreed-upon location throughout the duration of the exercise.

Opening and Closing Exercises, and exemption from them, are established in Ontario schools by the *Education Act* in Section 304 of the *Safe Schools Act, 2000*, and in Section 4 of Regulation 298.

Under section 304 of the *Safe Schools Act, 2000*, boards are required to ensure that opening and closing exercises are held in all of their schools. The exercises are required by the *Safe Schools Act* must include the singing of "O Canada" and may include the recitation of a pledge of citizenship. Students can be excused from participating in the exercises in the circumstances set out in the regulations:

Exemptions:

4. A student is not required to sing 'O Canada' or recite the pledge of citizenship in the following circumstances:
 - (1) In the case of a student who is less than 18 years old, if the student's parent or guardian applies to the principal to be exempted from doing so
 - (2) In the case of a student who is at least 18 years old, if the student applies to the principal to be exempted from doing so."

According to "Regulation to amend Regulation 298 of the Revised Regulations of Ontario, 1990, section 4" (September 1, 2000):

- "4. (1) Every public elementary and secondary school shall hold opening or closing exercises in public elementary and in public secondary schools.
 - (2) Opening or closing exercises shall include 'O Canada' and may include 'God Save the Queen' and may also include the following types of readings that impart social, moral, or spiritual values, and that are representative of Ontario's multicultural society.
 1. Scriptural Readings including prayers.
 2. Secular writings
 - (3) The opening or closing exercises may include a period of silence.
 - (4) In the following circumstances, a student is not required to participate in the opening or closing exercises described in this section
 1. In the case of a student who is less than 18 years old, if the student's parent or guardian applies to the principal of the school for an exemption from the exercises.
 2. In the case of a student who is at least 18 years old, if the student applies to the principal for an exempt

E4: Dietary Requirements

Guidelines

Schools and workplaces should be attentive to the dietary restrictions of the various religious groups. This includes attending to issues related to the menus provided by the catering firms, snacks in elementary schools, and catering for special occasions and community events.

E7: Modesty Requirements

Guidelines

Some religious communities observe strict modesty in attire. This can become a matter of concern when the students are asked to wear the brief clothing used in Physical Education activities.

If a family has concerns about this, the school should discuss the modesty requirements with them, and, taking into consideration Ministry of Education mandated expectations in the Physical Education curriculum, provide reasonable accommodations. The curriculum requirements should be explained to the family so that it has sufficient information to understand the Physical Education curriculum and to select available curriculum alternatives.

E8: Participation in Daily Activities and Curriculum

Guidelines

When accommodation is requested related to the contents of a curriculum in which there is a demonstrated conflict with a religious requirement, the school should have an informed discussion with parents/guardians and students.

The school should make it clear during the discussion that its role is to protect students and staff from harassment and discrimination that arise because of the religious practices that set individuals apart, and conflict with school routines and activities. Therefore, if curriculum directly conflicts with these practices, the school can consider accommodation. It cannot, however, accommodate religious values and beliefs that conflict with Board policies.

It is important to note that when an individual requests an accommodation related to the curriculum, the accommodation applies to that individual in question and not to the whole class or to classroom practices in general.

The Ministry of Education recommends substitutions when there are exemptions requested related to specific curriculum requirements. (OSS, Grades 9–12, Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999, 3.2)

In general, these Guidelines and Procedures recommend an informed, common-sense approach to questions of religion and curriculum; some questions and issues can be solved by an open discussion between the teacher and the student.

F. Limitations to Religious Accommodation

Religious accommodation in the KPRDSB is carried out in the larger context of the secular public education system. While the Board works to create a school system free from religious discrimination, this freedom is not absolute. The Board will limit practices or conduct in its schools that may put public safety, health, or the human rights and freedoms of others at risk. As well, the Board will limit practices or conduct in its schools that are in violation of other Board policies.

Appendix B: Interfaith Education Resources

Ontario Multifaith Council (OMC)

208-789 Don Mills Road
Toronto, ON M3C 1T5
Telephone: (416) 422-1490/(888)-837-0923
Fax: (416) 422-4359
Website: www.omc.ca
E-mail: omcsrc@omc.ca

The Ontario Multifaith Council's Library:

Telephone: (416) 422-1490 ext. 207
Toll free: 1-888-837-0923
Website: www.library.omc.ca
E-mail: thelibrary@omc.ca

Scarboro Missions Interfaith Dialogue

2685 Kingston Road
Scarborough, ON M1M 1M4
Website: www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/index.php

Interfaith Resources Online:

KPR's Equity & Diversity Calendar:
Website: www.kprschoools.ca/Students/LearningResources.html

Interfaith Calendar
Website: www.interfaithcalendar.org

BBC Religion
Website: www.bbc.co.uk/religion/

World Religion Day
www.worldreligionday.org