



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE 303	
SECTION: STUDENTS; PERSONNEL AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS	
Adopted/Original Date of Issue	May 2022
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Last Reviewed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised	April 2022
Next Review Date	May 2027
Contact	System Principal of Equity & Anti-Racism

Religious Accommodation

Background

Staff of the RCDSB recognizes and values the religious diversity within its community and is committed to providing a safe, respectful and equitable environment for all, free from all forms of discriminatory or harassing behaviours based on religion.

Freedom of religion is an individual right and a collective responsibility. The District commits to working with the community to foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes acceptance and protects religious freedom for all individuals. While the District and its staff will take all reasonable steps to ensure freedom of religion and religious practices consistent with the *Human Rights Code*, it is expected that students and their families will help the District to understand their religious needs and will work with the District and its schools to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations.

Definition of Creed

Creed is interpreted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s 1996 Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances as “religious creed” or “religion.” It is defined as 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.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, every person has the right to be free from discrimination or harassing behaviour that is based on religion or which arises because the person who is the target of the behaviour does not share the same faith. Atheists and agnostics are also protected under the *Human Rights Code*.

Creed does not include secular, moral, or ethical beliefs or political convictions. This policy does not extend to religions that incite hatred or violence against other individuals or groups, or to practices and observances that purport to have a religious basis, but which contravene international human rights standards or criminal law (Policy on Creed and the

Accommodation of Religious Observances, Ontario Human Rights Commission, October 20, 1996, pg. 2).

Absence for Religious Holy Days

The District is committed to affirm and value equally the faith diversity in our schools. Section 21(2) (g) of the *Education Act* provides that a student is excused from school attendance in observance of a “holy day by the church or religious denomination to which he/she belongs.” This requirement will be interpreted in accordance with the *Human Rights Code*. All staff who observe religious holidays in accordance with Section 21(2)(g) of the *Education Act* may be excused from attendance, in accordance with the District’s policy on religious leaves. The board will make reasonable efforts to acknowledge the different observances of their community when planning programs and events, such as system-wide tests and examinations. To the extent possible, conferences, meetings, workshops, co-curricular activities and exams/tests, will not be scheduled on significant faith days.

To assist in the District’s efforts to accommodate staff and students who observe recognized religious holy days, the following practices should be followed:

Staff

Employee requests for absence due to recognized Religious Holy Days should be handled through the normal requests for special leave process as outlined in the collective agreements. Requests for leave shall be made in a reasonable timeline to allow for possible scheduling changes and/or other planning. Responses to requests will be based on this guideline and appropriate collective agreements. Should a supervisor consider denying such a request, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Director’s Office.

Students

Students must present written notice from their parents/guardians specifying their accommodation needs relating to religious observances, including recognized holy days on which they will be absent from school. This notice should be made enough in advance (preferably at the beginning of each school year) to ensure that scheduling of major evaluations, such as tests, assignments or examinations, takes the religious observances into consideration.

In the case of an absence for religious holy day reasons, major tests or examinations should be rescheduled for the student. For example, schools should avoid EQAO testing during Ramadan.

Information about religions in Ontario, including information about recognized Religious Holy Days, can be found on the website of the Ontario Multi-Faith Council at www.omc.ca and www.interfaithcalendar.org.

Prayer

All RCDSB schools will make reasonable efforts to accommodate individuals’ requirement for daily prayer by providing an appropriate location within the building for students and staff to participate in prayer. This may mean a quiet space in the library, an empty room, or wherever it is mutually satisfactory for the school and the student or staff member requesting the accommodation.

Dietary Restrictions

Schools and workplaces must make every reasonable effort to accommodate for religious dietary restrictions that are brought to the attention of staff. Availability of vegetarian and/or halal options is recommended as a form of inclusive design.

Fasting

The District is sensitive to religious periods of fasting. Schools will endeavor to provide appropriate space, other than cafeterias or lunchrooms, for individuals who are fasting in religious observance. The District recognizes that students who are fasting may need accommodations from certain physical education activities and/or classes and schools should make reasonable efforts to provide appropriate accommodations.

Religious Dress

The District recognizes that there are certain religious communities that require specific items of ceremonial dress. The District recognizes that religious observance is not cultural dress, and will make reasonable efforts to provide appropriate accommodation with due consideration to safety and program needs.

Harassment about religious attire is a violation of the Renfrew County District School Board Human Rights Administrative Procedure 450 and is not to be permitted.

If a family has concerns about appropriate attire, the school will consult with the family about the concerns when a formal request has been brought forward to the principal.

Participation in Daily Activities and Curriculum

The District will seek to reasonably accommodate students where there is a demonstrated conflict between a specific class or curriculum and a religious requirement or observance. Where academic accommodation is requested, the school should have an informed discussion with the student's parents/guardians to understand the nature and extent of the conflict. Students should not be unfairly treated as a result of absences due to the observance of Holy days or practices.

The school should make it clear during the discussion that its role is to protect students and staff from harassment and discrimination because of their religion and cultural practices. Where these conflict with the school routines and activities or curriculum, the school should consider an accommodation. It cannot, however, accommodate religious values and beliefs that clearly conflict with mandated Ministry of Education and District policies.

It is important to note that when an individual requests an accommodation related to the curriculum, the accommodation applies to the 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 (Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9-12, Program and Diploma Requirements).

Limitations to Religious Accommodation

The District is committed to preventing and eradicating, within its school community, discrimination and harassment based on enumerated grounds set out in the *Code*, including creed. The District supports freedom of religion and an individual's right to manifest his/her religious beliefs and observances. The right to freedom of religion, however, is not absolute.

The Board will limit practices or behavior in its schools which may put public safety, health, or the human rights and freedoms of others at risk. As well, the District will limit practices or behaviors in its schools that are in violation of other District policies. These decisions will be made in accordance with the principles of the *Code*.

Legal References:

- *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15);*
- *The Ontario Human Rights Code; Education Act;*
- *Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 108 Opening and Closing Exercises in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools;*
- *PPM 119 Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools;*
- *R.R.O. Reg. 298: Sections 27-29 Religion in Schools.*

Approved:	May 2022
Reviewed:	May 2022
Revised:	April 2022