

The Peel District School Board, along with all Ontario public, Catholic and private schools, universities, colleges, and government and private organizations, has a legal duty to accommodate religious accommodation request(s) from students and staff to the extent of undue hardship in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code. This document sets out the recommended procedures for meeting and providing religious accommodation requests from students, staff and stakeholders in the Peel board.

**Students and staff of any faith background can request religious accommodation. Accommodation will be provided on a case by case basis, in the context of a public school board, and cannot replicate the experience or environment that an individual has in the home or a place of worship.** The Board is required to accommodate based on personal faith practice, not in comparison with other faiths. Religious Accommodation is not fixed, it is a process that is fluid and ongoing. Accommodation of religious beliefs and practices are best met through meaningful conversation and respectful relationships.

In accordance with [Board Policy 51](#) - Human Rights, and [Board Policy 54](#) - Equity and Inclusive Education, the Board recognizes the religious diversity represented in its students, staff, parents and stakeholder communities and is committed to an inclusive approach in all its activities related to religious accommodation. The Board is committed to removing any bias or system barriers to achieve equity and inclusion when faith request intersects with the areas of policies, programs, operations, practices and curricula. The Board acknowledges and respects an individual's right to practice or not practice a religion. Although religious observances are based on generally accepted practices of a faith group, the Board recognizes that there are variations amongst members of religious groups in their understanding, interpretation and practice of their religion.

This Operating Procedure clarifies the Board's Religious Accommodation procedures and includes resources to support administrators. For background information, glossary of key terms and supports please see list at the end of this document. This document applies to all Peel Board locations and functions.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION**

Inclusion is a core value of the Peel Board. The Board works to create a school system free from religious discrimination. However, this freedom is not absolute. The Board will limit practices and conduct in its schools/worksites which may put public safety, health, or the human rights and freedoms of others at risk. The Board will further limit practices and conduct that are in violation of other Board policies. The Board will not provide any accommodation for lessons that build a climate of inclusion and/or ensure safety of all students.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION**

Unless otherwise specified, parents, students and staff should request religious accommodation in writing in September or as soon as possible. The request should be specific and include the context using the [Parent or Student Religious Accommodation Request Form](#). Student/staff making a request should specify the religious requirements and the details of the area of the Board practice that needs to be accommodated. Emphasis will be placed by administrators on understanding the situation, context and practices that guide the request and the process of regular reviews of the accommodation, and learning impacts to students will be explained to parents. Parent/guardian permission is required as with all Board activities.

School administrators or worksite managers will respond to the accommodation request in a timely manner. The process outlined in the two flow charts for students will guide implementation; and the collective agreements in consultation with the Human Resources Department will define the steps for staff.

### **Areas of Accommodation**

When accommodation requests related to religious beliefs and practices arise in schools and/or worksites, suitable collaboration among school, student, family, religious community, staff and the Board is often needed in order to develop an appropriate accommodation. The Board respects the practice of diverse religious traditions within the system and individuals or groups who do not belong to an organized religion or practice a religion.

For many students and staff in Peel schools and worksites, there are two significant areas where accommodation may arise: A. Religious Practice B. Curriculum Expectations

#### **A. Accommodation of Religious Practice**

##### *1. Observation of major holy days, ceremonies, commemorations and celebrations*

Requests from students, parents and/or staff may be for a variety of reasons. The request may require some modification to the regular day, or a partial and/or full leave for the individual involved.

##### *2. School opening and closing exercises*

A student, parent or staff member's creed/religious beliefs may require accommodations for a part of or full school opening and closing exercise.

##### *3. Prayer and rituals*

A number of religions assign great significance to prayer and worship amongst its congregants. Some religions have requirements around prayer that are tied to specific days and times when it needs to be offered. This religious expectation is adhered to in varying forms by practicing members of the faith. Peel Board will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate requests from diverse students/staff and parents. Peel Board also acknowledges that prayer is a personal matter and is practiced differently by each individual.

The Board recognizes that there are some religious practices that require the separation of male/female gender during prayer accommodations. The law is clear – the Board cannot interfere in the practice of faith. Students who have been provided with religious accommodation for prayer choose how they pray based on their personal faith practice.

The Peel Board will accommodate prayer requests – daily, weekly or otherwise as per negotiated individual accommodation. The process for making and reviewing accommodation requests are found below and in Appendix C – Religious Accommodation Request Flowchart – Student.

Staff prayer requests for accommodations will be met in consultation with Human Resources and with no or minimal impact to the job requirement as per collective agreements.

**The following guidelines apply to all student prayer accommodation:**

- All prayer spaces must be supervised by school staff, however staff may not lead the prayer or the prayer process.
- All prayer accommodation must comply with the school code of conduct, the Education Act, its Regulations and the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Appropriate disciplinary and corrective action will be taken where there are any contraventions of the Ontario Human Rights Code or the school code of conduct.
- Prayer is offered individually, however, two or more students can pray together where circumstances permit.

**Jummah (Friday noon) prayer**

Jummah requires practicing Muslims to offer the prayer in a congregation and in a specific format (a student leading or beginning the prayer followed by a khutbah). In addition to following the guidelines for all prayer accommodation listed in the previous paragraph, the following additional guidelines apply specifically to Jummah prayer accommodation at the Peel Board:

- Jummah prayer will be led by students only.
- Students may write their own khutbah or can use a prewritten khutbah.
- Khutbahs may have 2 components; direct quotes from scriptures in Arabic, and personal student reflection in English.
- Jummah prayer accommodation generally applies to grades 6 to 12 students. Elementary students (grades K-5) are usually not religiously obligated to offer the prayer.

#### 4. *Dietary requirements*

The Board will make every reasonable effort to be attentive to the diverse dietary requirements of its students, staff and parents (i.e. halal, kosher, vegan, vegetarian). This includes attending to issues related to the menus provided by the catering firms, offered snacks, catering for special occasions and community events. Breakfast and lunch programs in both secondary and elementary schools will consider these dietary requirements in their menu planning. Special attention will be given to overnight outdoor education activities as well as field trips that include a meal.

Please note: the food provided to accommodate one group (Halal, for example) is not an acceptable solution for all present.

#### 5. *Fasting*

Many individuals fast as part of their religious practice. This may include abstaining from and/ or reducing food, drink; and engagement in other Board/school activities. The Peel Board will accommodate individual requests related to fasting. Fasting length can vary in duration and occurrences.

Student participation in fasts will vary by age, maturity, level of understanding and religious practice and schools should follow the direction of the parent, guardian or caregiver in arriving at accommodation.

#### 6. *Religious attire*

The Board will recognize and accommodate the students/staff with regard to religious attire. The individual request should demonstrate the religious requirement for accommodation. Some religious attire that will be accommodated includes, but is not limited to:

- Hairstyles
- Headwear
- Wearing religious symbols
- Clothing
- Dressing for participation in Health and Physical Education and Extra-Curricular Activities

#### 7. *Religious leave*

Students are excused from attendance at school if they are absent on a holy day approved by the Board, or a holy day observed by the religious denomination they belong to/identify with. (Education Act, Section 21:2(g))

Students are required to provide written religious leave notification from their parents/guardians. The notice should be made enough in advance to ensure any rescheduling of school/curriculum expectations (e.g. tests, assignments, exams, sports meets, competitions).

Staff absence due to religious observances will be consistent with the respective collective agreements where applicable, and the [Board Policy 23](#) - Leaves of Absence. Staff requesting religious leave on days not on the Board approved list as per the Holy Days and Holidays Calendar, will apply for leave under the Exception to Religious Leave Guidelines through the Human Resources Department and through the Employee Relations Officers. A three week prior notice to the requested holy day leave is required.

- Information on Exceptions to Staff Approved Holy Days
- Exception Form to the Leave of Absence Policy # 23

Schools will make every reasonable effort to be aware of the significant religious observances of their students, staff and parent community and avoid scheduling special school events and activities like concerts, exams, parent interviews, field trips, excursions, professional development days, special meetings etc. This also applies to worksites of the Peel Board, and includes system-wide special events, meetings of the elected Board and committees of the Board.

Schools will make the information on Board approved Holy Days and the related request process available to students, parents and staff through a variety of methods – student agendas, school newsletters, daily announcements, Holy Days and Holidays Calendar.

### **Considerations for religious practice accommodation: questions to guide administrators**

The following questions will help guide administrators to process religious accommodation requests in an equitable and inclusive manner:

#### *Religious Nature*

What is the administrator's understanding of the religious nature of the request? If support is required, contact the Community Liaison Coordinator.

#### *Full Withdrawal Request*

Does the request impact any of the human rights protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code? Call the Community Liaison Coordinator for clarification.

#### *Communication to Others*

School-wide communication about religious accommodation is not permitted. Any related communication should be made directly with the student(s) being provided accommodation. Who else needs to know about the decision to accommodate? Inform teacher(s). Complete the Administrator Form: Religious Accommodation Plan. Copy to parent; OSR.

#### *Supervision and Space Requirements*

What are the considerations for supervision of students and space requirements if needed?

## **B. Accommodation of Curriculum Expectations**

### **1. Participation in daily activities and curriculum**

When accommodation related to the school activity and/or curriculum content is requested, schools will identify an appropriate accommodation that is focused on participation and inclusion following the steps outlined in the Flow Charts and the conversation flows related to curriculum.

It is important to note that when an individual requests a curriculum accommodation, the reached agreement applies only to the individual student in question and not to all the students of that faith, the whole class or to classroom practices in general.

### **Considerations for curriculum accommodation: questions to guide administrators**

The following questions will help guide administrators to process religious accommodation requests for curriculum expectations in an equitable and inclusive manner:

#### *Religious Nature*

What is the administrator's understanding of the religious nature of the request? If support is required, contact the Instructional Coordinator—Equity.

#### *Full Withdrawal Request*

Does the request impact any of the human rights protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code? See Religious Accommodation Request Flowchart - Curriculum Expectations.

#### *Communication to Others*

School-wide communication about religious accommodation is not permitted. Any related communication should be made directly with the student(s) being provided accommodation. Who else needs to know about the decision to accommodate? Inform teacher(s). Complete the Administrator Form: Religious Accommodation Plan. Copy to parent; OSR.

#### *Supervision and Space Requirements*

What are the considerations for supervision of students and space requirements if needed?

#### *Assessment Implications*

How will assessment, evaluation and reporting occur given the accommodations as full withdrawal?

## **Religious Accommodation limitations:**

### *1. Board/School Functions and Places of Worship*

The Board and schools will not use places of worship for any system events and functions out of respect for the many religions practiced by the student, staff and parent communities, and for those individuals who do not belong to any organized religion or choose to not identify with any religion.

- Events organized by the Board and/or schools (e.g. Commencements) will not be held in places of worship of any kind.
- Students and schools may participate in events and activities (e.g. Kiwanis Music Fest, Sears Drama Festival) organized by non-board organizations which are held in places of worship or faith centers.

### *2. Religious Clubs in Peel Schools*

The formation of religious clubs in Peel schools is consistent with the [Board Policy 58: Extra- Curricular Activity](#) and student requests will be supported in accordance with the guidelines outlined Leadership Development and School Support Services 25.

Religious accommodation activities related to personal faith practice are not permitted within a religious club. If needing accommodation, students who are members of a religious clubs are also required to apply, follow and meet the criteria for religious accommodation.

### *3. Involvement of Religious Leaders in Schools*

The religious accommodation process recognizes the sincerely held beliefs and practices of individuals and families. Religious leaders can be consulted for the purposes of clarity. However the Board does not require religious leaders to legitimize beliefs and practices of students and families or be involved in the decision making process of a religious accommodation. In addition, religious leaders are not to be present when students observe prayers in schools.

## REFERENCES

[Parent or Student Religious Accommodation Request Form](#)

Administrator Form: Religious Accommodation Plan

Religious Accommodation Request Flowchart - Student

Religious Accommodation Request Flowchart - Curriculum Expectations

Glossary of Key Terms

Faith Descriptions

References and Support Materials

Education Act, Section 21:2(g)

[Board Policy 51](#)

[Board Policy 54](#)

[Board Policy 58](#)

Leadership Development and School Support Services 25

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