



BOARD ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE	
<i>Administrative Procedure</i> Religious Accommodation	<i>Administrative Procedure Number</i> 702 (NEW)
<i>Directional Policy</i> 700 - Equity and Inclusive Education	

TITLE OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE:

Religious Accommodation

DATE APPROVED:

April 2021

PROJECTED REVIEW DATE:

April 2026

DIRECTIONAL POLICY ALIGNMENT:

Freedom of religion is an individual right and a collective responsibility. The Board commits to work with the community it serves to foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes acceptance and protects individuals from discrimination and harassment on the basis of their religion, consistent with the exercise of the Board's denominational rights under section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and as recognized in section 19 of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

"The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society." (Fratelli Tutti, 271).

The Board is committed to providing an environment that is inclusive and free of barriers. Accommodation will be provided in accordance with the principles of the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy. The Board will work cooperatively, and in a spirit of respect, with all partners in the accommodation process.

ALIGNMENT WITH MULTI-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Catholic Education Directional Policy supports our Vision for Achieving excellence in Catholic Education LEARN • LEAD • SERVE.

This Vision calls the Board to these Strategic Priorities:



Strategic Priorities 2017-2020

Vision

Achieving Excellence in Catholic Education
LEARN • LEAD • SERVE

Mission

To educate students in faith-filled, safe, inclusive Catholic learning communities by nurturing the mind, body and spirit of all.

LEARN

Achieve excellence in instruction and assessment to enable all students to become reflective, self-directed, lifelong learners.

LEAD

Foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, to enable all students to realize their God-given potential.

SERVE

Inspire engagement and commitment to stewardship for creation to enable all students to become caring and responsible citizens.

ACTION REQUIRED:

The Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board is committed to the values of freedom of religion and freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviours based on religion and will take all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations within the legal rights afforded to the Catholic school system, as per section 93 of the Constitution Act of 1867. Such accommodations will be provided to staff, students and their families.

INTRODUCTION:

The Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board (the Board) believes in the dignity of all people and their equality as children of God. The Board recognizes the importance of freedom of religion and strives to recognize, value and honour the many customs, traditions and beliefs that make up the Catholic community.

Freedom of religion is an individual right and a collective responsibility. The Board commits to work with the community it serves to foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes acceptance and protects individuals from discrimination and harassment on the basis of their religion.

In accordance with the Catholic Church's teachings, it is the policy of the Board to provide, in all its operations, an educational environment which promotes and supports diversity within its Catholic community as well as the equal attainment of life opportunities for all students, staff, parents and other members of that community.

I. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

All school boards exist within a broader context of law and public policy that protect and defend human rights. At the Board, a number of policy statements have been developed that reinforce both federal and provincial legislation, and also help ensure that the freedoms they set out are protected within the school system.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Section 15) guarantees freedom of religion. *The Ontario Human Rights Code* (The Code) protects an individual's freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviours based on religion. Consistent with this legislation is *The Education Act*, its Regulations and policies governing Equity and Inclusion in Schools:

- 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".

The Board and its staff are committed to the elimination of discrimination as outlined in this Federal and Provincial legislation in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of its denominational rights under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and as recognized in section 19 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code* ("the Code").

The Board recognizes, and is committed to, the values of freedom of religion and freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviour based on religion through its human rights policy, equity and inclusive education policy, the safe schools policy and curriculum documents. All of these will be informed by, and interpreted in accordance with, the principles of *the Code*.

This Administrative Procedure under the Equity & Inclusive Education Policy reflects the Board's fidelity to Canadian law protecting freedom of religion in accordance with the Catholic Church's teachings.

II. ACCOMMODATION GUIDELINES

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure that all Board staff, students, parents and other members of the school community are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the *Code* with respect to religious accommodation. It also sets out the Board's procedures for accommodation and the responsibilities of each of the parties to the accommodation process. In accordance with the Equity Strategy, the *Code* and OHRC's *Guidelines on Developing Human Rights Policies and Procedures*, it is intended that the accommodation process, as well as the accommodation itself, be effective and respectful of the dignity of accommodation seekers.

All students registered in PVNCCDSB schools acknowledge that the school community proclaims, celebrates and cherishes its Catholic identity and traditions and that staff will teach the curriculum from a Catholic perspective. In respect of religious accommodation, the Board acknowledges that all students, in accordance with what the Catholic Church offers in its social teachings and reflective practice are entitled to their rights and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The Board is committed to providing an environment that is inclusive and that is free of barriers based on creed (religion). Accommodation will be provided in accordance with the principles of dignity, individualization, and inclusion. The Board will work cooperatively, and in a spirit of respect, with all partners in the accommodation process.

1. Accommodation Based on Request

- The Board will take all reasonable steps to provide accommodation to individual members of a religious group to facilitate their religious beliefs and practices. All accommodation requests will be taken seriously. No person will be penalized for making an accommodation request.
- The Board will base its decision to accommodate by applying the Code's criteria of undue hardship, the Board's ability to fulfill its duties under Board policies and the Education Act.
- When concerns related to beliefs and practices arise in schools, collaboration among school, student, family, and religious community is needed in order to develop appropriate accommodation. It is the role of the Board and its staff to ensure equity and respect for the diverse religious beliefs and practices of students and their families and other staff in the school system. However, school administrators should not be placed in the position of monitoring a child's compliance with a religious obligation, and enforcing such practices, for example, ensuring a head covering is worn is not a responsibility.

2. General Procedures for Religious Accommodation

Staff

The person requesting accommodation should advise the administration at the beginning of the school year, to the extent possible. If September notice 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 this policy and the appropriate collective agreement.

Students

Students must present verbal or written notice from their parents/guardians specifying their accommodation needs relating to religious observances, including 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.

Student handbooks and parent newsletters should include information about the procedure to follow to request an accommodation for religious observances and/or holy days. Such procedures shall be easy for staff, students and parents to understand.

3. Areas of Accommodation

For many students and staff of the Board, 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 include, but are not limited to the following:

- i. School opening and closing exercises;
- ii. Leave of Absence for Religious Holy Days;
- iii. Prayer;
- iv. Dietary requirements;
- v. Fasting;
- vi. Religious dress;
- vii. Modesty requirements in physical education; and
- viii. Participation in daily activities and curriculum.

III. GENERAL GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

This policy will consider each (of the above stated) area of accommodation in turn.

1. School Opening and Closing Ceremonies

Pursuant to the Ontario Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108 ("Memorandum No. 108"), if a student or parent/guardian objects to all or part of the opening or closing exercises due to religious beliefs, the student will be exempted

and given the option not to participate and to remain in class or in an agreed upon location through the duration of the exercise.

Memorandum No. 108 states the following:

1. All public elementary and secondary schools in Ontario must be opened or closed each day with the national anthem. “God Save the Queen” may be included.
2. The inclusion of any content beyond “O Canada” in opening or closing exercises is to be optional for public school boards.
3. Where public school boards resolve to include, in the opening or closing exercises in their schools, anything in addition to the content set out in item 1 above, it must be composed of either or both of the following:
 - a. One or more readings that impart social, moral, or spiritual values and that are representative of our multicultural society. Readings may be chosen from both scriptural writings, including prayers, and secular writings;
 - b. A period of silence.
4. Parents who object to part or all of the exercises may apply to the Principal to have their children exempted. Students who are adults may also exercise such a right. These requirements will be interpreted in accordance with the *Code* and the Board will consider other requests for accommodation as may be made.

2. Absence for Religious Holy Days

The Board affirms and values the faith diversity in our Catholic secondary schools. Section 21(2) (g) of the Education Act provides that a person is excused from school attendance in observance of a “holy day by the Church or religious denomination to which he/she belongs.”

All staff and students who observe religious holidays in accordance with section 21(2) (g) of the Education Act may be excused from attendance, subject to the particular request for religious leave process.

The Board will encourage members of diverse groups to identify their religious holy days at the beginning of each school year. The Board will make reasonable efforts to acknowledge the different observances of their Catholic community when planning programs and events, such as Board-wide tests and examinations. To the extent possible, conferences, meetings, workshops, co-curricular activities and exams/tests, will not be scheduled on these significant faith days:

(Examples of) Significant Holy Days	
Religion	Holy Day
Bahai	Ridvan
Buddhist	Lunar New Year/Chinese
Western Christian	Good Friday
Eastern Chrsitian	Christmas Holy Friday
Hindu	Diwali
Jewish	Rosh Hashanah (2 days) Yom Kippur Passover (first day)
Muslim	Eid-ul-Fitr Eid-ul-adha
Sikh	Baisakhi

(A multi-faith calendar will help schools make appropriate accommodations.)

Guidelines for Administrators

All staff and students who request to observe a religious holy day should be allowed this right without having to undergo any unnecessary hardship.

Staff requesting a leave should advise the school administration at, or as close as possible to, the beginning of the school year and leave should be granted in accordance with the terms of the appropriate collective agreement.

Students requesting a leave should give verbal or written notice from their parent/guardian to the school at, or as close as possible to, the beginning of the school year. Such procedures should be easy to understand and follow.

Student agendas, school newsletters and announcements should include information about the procedures for requesting leaves.

All staff members acting on behalf of/representing the Board on other organizations, which in partnership with the Board are planning events or activities that involve students and/or staff of Board schools, have the responsibility to bring this procedure to the attention of these organizations.

For consultation or further clarification of questions, administrators and managers should contact the office of the Superintendent responsible for Equity and Inclusive Education.

Unresolved Requests

Despite the Board's commitment to accommodate, an individual may feel that discrimination based on religion has occurred. The Board will take reasonable and timely steps to address the unresolved issues raised by the affected person which could include dispute resolution mechanisms.

Employee

In the event that, after an employee's consultation with the Superintendent of Education, unresolved issues remain, then the matter will be referred to the Superintendent of Human Resources.

Students

In the event that a student maintains that his or her rights under the Board's religious accommodation policy have been compromised, then the matter will be referred to the appropriate Superintendent of Education.

3. Prayer

The Board recognizes the significance of prayer in religious practice. Board 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. Adult presence should be for supervision purposes only.

4. Dietary Restrictions

The Board is sensitive to the different dietary restrictions of various religious groups. Such sensitivity includes attending to issues related to the menus provided by catering companies, snacks in elementary schools, and food provided within schools, at school-sponsored activities and community events.

Breakfast and lunch programs in both secondary and elementary schools will consider relevant dietary restrictions in their menu planning. Availability of vegetarian options is recommended as a form of inclusive design.

Special attention needs to be given to overnight outdoor education activities, as well as field trips that extend over a mealtime period.

5. Fasting

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

6. Religious Dress

“Dress Code” is the appropriate dress policy established by a school, and may include a school uniform. The Board recognizes that there are certain religious communities that require specific items of ceremonial dress. The Board understands that some religious attire, which is a requirement of religious observance, may not conform to a school’s Dress Code. Board schools will reasonably accommodate students with regard to religious attire. Religious attire is not cultural dress; it is a requirement of religious observation.

Religious attire that should be reasonably accommodated in Board schools includes, but is not limited to:

- Head covers: Yarmulkes, turbans, Rastafarian headdress, hijabs
- Crucifixes, Stars of David, etc.
- Items of ceremonial dress (i.e., Kirpan guideline)

Where uniforms are worn, administrators may ask the student to wear religious attire in the same colour as the uniform (e.g. the head scarves for females); however, there may be religious requirements of colour that cannot be modified.

Special attention must be given to accommodations necessary for a student to participate in physical education and school organized sports. Where possible, these should be incorporated into Board policies as part of an inclusive design process.

The Board seeks to foster an atmosphere of cultural understanding in order to be proactive in addressing potential harassment about religious attire. Schools should be aware that harassment about religious attire is one of the most common types of harassment and bullying. The Board and its schools will not tolerate any teasing directed at, or inappropriate actions taken against, an individual’s religious attire and there will be appropriate consequences for individuals who violate this rule.

There are religious communities that require specific items of ceremonial dress which may be commonly perceived as contravening Board policies, for example the use of the Kirpan by Khalsa Sikh students. For specific guidelines on the accommodation of Khalsa Sikh students wishing to carry a Kirpan, please see the guideline at this [link](#).

7. Modesty Requirements for Dress in Physical Education Classes

The Board recognizes that some religious communities observe strict modesty attire in respect of their religion. This can become a matter of concern when students are asked to wear the clothing used in physical education activities. Such policies should be designed inclusively, taking into account common religious needs that may exist.

If a family has concerns that cannot be addressed through inclusive design, the school should discuss the modesty requirements with them, and, taking into consideration the Ministry of Education's mandated expectations in the physical education curriculum, provide reasonable accommodation. 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.

8. Participation in Daily Activities and Curriculum

The Board 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.

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, activities or curriculum, the school should consider accommodation. It cannot, however, accommodate religious values and beliefs that clearly conflict with mandated Ministry of Education and Board 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 [Ed. Act. 42 (13)].

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). In general, the Board recommends an informed, common-sense approach to questions of religion and curriculum. Hopefully, these questions can be solved by an open discussion between the teacher, the student and his/her family.

IV. LIMITATIONS TO RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

1. The Board 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 and religious accommodation in the Board is carried out in the larger context of the Catholic education system and denominational rights of Catholic schools.

2. The Board, at all times, will seek to accommodate an individual's right to freedom of religion in a manner that not only respects the individual's beliefs but the principles of the Catholic Church.
3. As for chapels in Catholic schools, they are specifically designed and furnished for prayer and liturgy within the Catholic tradition and are not to be considered multi-faith chapels. Following the general custom of the Church, non-Catholics are welcome to join in prayer services and liturgical celebrations of the Catholic Church community (keeping in mind some restrictions such as sharing in Holy Communion). Such a chapel is open to all people for individual silent prayer or meditation. However, it is not appropriate that non Catholic liturgies or group prayers be held in this setting.
4. It is therefore recommended:
 - i. that school administrators designate another appropriate space or classroom, other than the chapel, for religious celebrations celebrated by other Christian denominations or faith traditions; and,
 - ii. that Catholic school boards consult with their respective local Ordinary on such accommodations.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Board of Trustees is responsible for:

- ensuring alignment with the Equity and Inclusive Education directional policy; and
- reviewing the Religious Accommodation Procedure as part of its regular policy and procedures review cycle;

The Director of Education is responsible for:

- designating resources for ensuring the implementation of and compliance with this Administrative Procedure;

Superintendents of Schools and System Portfolios are responsible for:

- reviewing and revising this administrative procedure as necessary;
- reviewing all submitted requests for their family of schools

Principals and Vice-Principals are responsible for:

- implementing school wide practices to ensure religious accommodations are taken into account;

- investigating all complaints related to religious accommodations and reporting these to the appropriate FOS Superintendent;
- implementing processes as outlined in the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy;

Staff are responsible for:

- implementing the school wide practices into their classroom/practices to ensure religious accommodations are taken into account;
- investigating all complaints related to religious accommodations and reporting these to the Principal;
- implementing processes as outlined in the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy;
- communicating (in writing) any specific religious holidays or attire they will need to be accommodated in or before September. If September notice is not feasible, the person should make the request as early as possible.

Students are responsible for:

- implementing the school wide practices into their daily routines to ensure the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy directives are followed;
- report any behaviour that goes against the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy to their teacher or administrators;
- communicating with parental consent (written notice) any specific religious holidays or attire they will need to be accommodated in or before September. If September notice is not feasible, the person should make the request as early as possible.

Parents are responsible for:

- supporting the school wide practices to ensure the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy directives are followed;
- report any behaviour that goes against the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy to staff or administrators;
- communicating (in writing) any specific religious holidays or attire they will need to be accommodated in or before September. If September notice is not feasible, the person should make the request as early as possible.

VI. PROGRESS INDICATORS:

- The Equity and Inclusive Education Policy is applied consistently at all Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board educational settings;
- all board employees report serious student incidents to the respective principal as soon as reasonably possible;
- school based discipline data reflects positive trends in student behaviour;
- school climate and student census surveys (as of 2023) indicate that staff and students feel accepted and safe in their learning and work environments accordingly.

VII. DEFINITIONS:**1. Accommodation**

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances defines "accommodation" as a duty corresponding to the right to be free from discrimination. The Code provides the right to be free from discrimination, and there is a general corresponding duty to protect the right: the "duty to accommodate." The duty arises when a person's religious beliefs conflict with a requirement, qualification or practice. The Code imposes a duty to accommodate based on the needs of the group of which the person making the request is a member. Accommodation may modify a rule or make an exception to all or part of it for the person requesting accommodation. (Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances, Ontario Human Rights Commission, October 20, 1996, pg. 5) The duty to accommodate is 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. In determining whether there is undue hardship, section 24(2) of the Code provides that reference should be made to the cost of accommodation, outside sources of funding, if any, and health and safety requirements.

2. 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.

Creed does not include secular, moral, or ethical beliefs or political convictions. This administrative procedure and its accompanying policy, Equity and Inclusive Education, 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). Exemption from religious studies due to creed will be made in accordance with procedures outlined in the Education Act 42 (13).

3. Undue Hardship

Accommodation will be provided to the point of undue hardship, as defined by the OHRC (for example in the *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate*). A determination regarding undue hardship will be based on an assessment of costs, outside sources of funding, and health and safety. It will be based on objective evidence.

A determination that an accommodation will create undue hardship carries with it significant liability for the Board. It should be made only with the approval of the Director of Education.

Where a determination is made that an accommodation would create undue hardship, the person requesting accommodation will be given written notice, including the reasons for the decision and the objective evidence relied upon. Such written notice will be issued by the Superintendent responsible for Equity and Inclusive Education. The accommodation seeker shall be informed of his or her recourse under the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

Where a determination has been made that an accommodation would cause undue hardship, the Board will proceed to implement the next best accommodation short of undue hardship, or will consider phasing in the requested accommodation.

4. Dress Code

It is the policy of the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board that all schools adopt a student dress code that is consistent with the Board's philosophy, vision statement, and Catholic social teaching. All secondary schools shall have a school dress code.

REFERENCES:

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
 - [Fundamental Freedoms Section 2](#)
 - [Legal Rights Sections 7-14](#)
 - [Equality Rights Section 15](#)
- [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) Equality Rights, Chapter 15 (1), (2), 29
- [The Code of Canon Law](#), Can. 793 (1), 795, 796 (1), 803 (2)
- [Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan](#)
- [Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#)

- Ontario Human Rights Commission
 - [A policy primer: Guide to developing human rights policies and procedures.](#)
 - [Religious Rights Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
 - [Policy on creed and the accommodation of religious observances](#)
 - [Policy statement on Religious Accommodation](#)
 - [Policy on preventing discrimination based on creed](#)
- Ontario *Education Act*
 - [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108](#). Queen's Printer for Ontario.
 - [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119](#). Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board, "Equity and Inclusive Education", Policy #700, 2020
- Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board, "Religious Accommodations" procedure 702