

Creed (Religious) Accommodation Guideline

1. Legislative Context

Lakehead District School Board recognizes the pluralistic nature of Canada. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedoms such as freedom of religion. The Board upholds the Ontario Human Rights Code

3. Suggested Responses to Requests for Accommodation

School Opening and Closing Exercises

A student or employee who objects to all or part of opening or closing exercises for faith-based reasons will be exempted and given the option not to participate and to remain in the class or in an agreed-upon location.

Prayer

Schools should make every reasonable effort to accommodate the requirements for daily prayer by providing an appropriate location within the building for prayer when requested by students or staff. Some accommodation for late school arrival and/or early school leaving may be necessary. Prayer times change in some faiths according to the seasons.

Dietary Requirements

Schools should be aware of dietary restrictions of various faith groups. This awareness includes breakfast and lunch programs, snacks, overnight outdoor education activities and field trips that cover a meal-time period, and catering for special occasions and community events. Provision of halal, kosher or vegetarian options may be needed.

Fasting

Schools should accommodate students and staff with respect to fasting observances. Appropriate space other than the cafeteria or lunchroom should be designated during lunch period for fasting students. Field trip plans should also consider the needs of fasting students. Students might need exemptions or alteration of activities in some classes, e.g., physical education.

Religious Attire

Student/staff wearing of certain hairstyles and attire, such as, but not limited to: yarmulkes, turbans, hijab (headscarves), crucifixes, stars of David, should be permitted. It is worth noting that harassment based on religious attire or wearing articles of faith is one of the most common forms of discrimination. Staff attitudes are crucial to establishing a positive climate of understanding and respect for differences regarding faith-based attire.

Accommodation of Religion Related Dress for Physical Education

When a student requests an accommodation for dress code for participation in physical education activities including swimm.9 Tm0 G[)]T&Tm[or]11F1 11.04 r EMC /Span MCID ET@.00000

Participation in Daily Activities, Curriculum and Program

When an accommodation is requested, related to the content of curriculum and/or program, it is important to have an open discussion between the parents/guardians and the school. The accommodation applies to the individual who requests it, not the whole class or classroom practices in general.

Observing Faith-based (Creed) Days of Significance

It is recommended that schools recognize religious days of significance, pertinent to their school community. Recognition may include

Unresolved Requests

When a determination is made that an accommodation would create undue hardship, the person requesting the accommodation will be given written notice, including the reasons for the decision and the objective evidence relied upon.

In the event an accommodation request is not granted, the matter will be referred to the appropriate superintendent.

5. Recognizing Holy Days in Schools

The intent of recognizing faith-based holy days or events is to educate, not indoctrinate. Days of religious significance as identified in the Board's Diversity calendar should be recognized to the degree it is appropriate in each school setting. Recognition means the inclusion of events in a school curricular and co-curricular program, and may occur through festivals, concerts and other activities.

6. Distribution of Faith Literature and Resources

Lakehead District School Board facilities will not distribute faith-based literature to students. The only exception to this statement is if the materials support curriculum expectations in a program of study. School libraries may include faith texts in their collections as sources of information for students and staff.

7. Common Concerns

Can schools display a Santa Claus?

Yes. Santa Claus is a symbol of the Christmas season, but it is not the only symbol of celebrations in that season. Symbols associated with the special days of other faiths should be displayed at that time of the year when they are recognized.

Can schools display a Nativity scene?

Yes. A display for any faith can be exhibited. Such a display would constitute part of the educational component as described in this guideline. A display for any faith, e.g., a Nativity scene, a menorah or Shiva figure, should be accompanied with an appropriate explanation of the meaning of the day or event, i.e., why it is being recognized. However, a display of only one faith during the school year would be inconsistent with Ministry and Board expectations.

What is the recommended general approach to the December holiday season?

It is recommended that many faith and cultural days of significance be recognized during their season and with authenticity throughout the school year to build a sense of respect for differences, global awareness and equity in the school's culture. It is important to demonstrate the common bonds and principles among the various traditions while respecting and valuing their differences. It is inappropriate to avoid recognizing traditions for fear that schools are unable to recognize everything to the same degree. The intent of inclusion is as important as the "fairness factor".

