



POLICY SECTION: Safe Schools

SUB-SECTION:

POLICY NAME: OPENING AND CLOSING EXERCISES

POLICY NO: S.S. 02

Date Approved: September 6, 2001	Date of Review: January 26, 2022	Dates of Amendment: Sept. 6, 2001; November 14, 2002; August 27, 2015; January 26, 2017
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Cross Reference:

Ministry of Ontario Regulation 298 Operation of Schools
Ministry of Ontario Regulation 435/00 Opening or Closing Exercises
TCDSB Policy S. 23 Prayer in Schools
TCDSB Policy S. 22 Religious Accommodation
TCDSB Policy H. M. 24 Catholic Equity and Inclusive Education Policy
Ontario Ministry of Education PPM 119, Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario

Attachments:

Appendix A: Exemption Request Form: Parent
Appendix B: Exemption Request Form: Student

Purpose:

This Policy provides direction on opening and closing exercises in schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board which are reflective of the board's commitment to Living Our Values and developing school communities formed by Catholic beliefs and traditions.



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Scope and Responsibility:

The policy governs all schools within the TCDSB. The Director of Education is responsible for this policy.

Alignment with MYSP:

Living Our Catholic Values

Fostering Student Achievement and Well Being

Strengthening Public Confidence

Policy

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is committed to living the values of our Catholic faith and to supporting the development of school communities formed by Catholic beliefs and traditions, while also fostering national pride. Each principal of a school within the Toronto Catholic District School Board will ensure that daily opening and closing exercises include public prayer and the singing of O Canada.

Regulations:

1. The principal shall, in annual consultation with the Catholic School Parent Council, establish procedures for opening and closing exercises. These procedures will be reviewed at the beginning of each school year.
2. In respect of the national anthem, students will sing O Canada a cappella or with musical accompaniment, as deemed appropriate.



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3. Consistent with the Board's Multi Year Strategic Plan and the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, and Board policy S. 23, *Prayer in Schools*, prayers and/or scriptural readings will form an integral part of each opening or closing exercise.
4. The principal may decide, after consultation with the school council, to include the Pledge of Citizenship *in the opening or closing exercise*. The version recited will be the one set out in regulation as follows:
"I affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, and to her heirs and successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian Citizen."
5. A pupil is not required to sing O Canada or recite the pledge of citizenship in the following circumstances:
 - a. In the case of a pupil who is less than 18 year old, if the pupil's parent or guardian applies in writing to the principal to be exempted from doing so. (Appendix A)
 - b. In the case of a pupil who is at least 18 years old, if the pupil applies in writing to the principal to be exempted from doing so. (Appendix B)
6. Any pupil exempted under regulation 5, will follow locally established school procedures for respecting the singing of O Canada a cappella, or with musical accompaniment, as deemed appropriate, and/or the recitation of the Pledge of Citizenship; for example: stop, stand respectfully, remove hat, etcetera.



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7. Consistent with S. 22, Prayer in Schools, TCDSB will, at all times, 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.
8. It is understood that all students registered in TCDSB 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. At the same time, the school is enriched and is committed to providing an environment that is inclusive, safe and free of barriers based on religion.
9. In respect of religious accommodation, TCDSB acknowledges that all students, in accordance with what the Catholic Church offers in its teachings and reflective practice, are entitled to their rights and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code.
10. The TCDSB stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples of Canada and acknowledges that all stakeholders live, work, play and learn on Indigenous lands. The following daily acknowledgement will be incorporated into each school's Opening Exercises:
Out of our deep respect for Indigenous peoples in Canada, we acknowledge that all Toronto Catholic District School Board properties are situated upon traditional territories. The territories include the Wendat, the Anishinabek (a-ni-shna-bek) Nation, the Haudenosaunee (hoh-Dee-noh-Shoh-nee) Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations. We also recognize the contributions and enduring presence of all First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people in Ontario and the rest of Canada.



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11. Prior to the commencement of classes in September, the principal shall communicate to all classroom teachers in writing the local expectations congruent with the Policy regarding the scheduling of Opening Exercises.

Definitions:

Accommodation

An adjustment made to policies, programs, guidelines, or practices, including adjustments to physical settings and various types of criteria, that enables individuals to benefit from and take part in the provision of services equally and to participate equally and perform to the best of their ability in the workplace or an educational setting. Accommodations are provided so that individuals are not disadvantaged or discriminated against on the basis of the prohibited grounds.

Religious Accommodation

An obligation under the Ontario Human Rights Code to provide reasonable accommodation for students and employees who wish to observe the tenets or practices of their faith, as well as for those who wish not to participate in any form of religious observance.

Ontario Human Rights Code, Section 19

While the Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination and provides equal treatment for all people in Ontario with respect to a number of categories, Section 19 recognizes that the Code will not be construed to adversely affect any right or privilege respecting separate schools enjoyed by separate school boards or their supporters under the constitution Act, 1867 and the Education Act.



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Evaluation and Metrics:

1. Implementation of the Opening and Closing Exercises policy is the responsibility of the school principal, in consultation with the Area Superintendent.
2. The consistent application of religious accommodation requests will be monitored and reported in an annual report to the Board of Trustees.



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APPENDIX A: EXEMPTION REQUEST FORM: PARENT

The principal will exempt students from the singing of “O Canada” and the recitation of the Pledge of Citizenship upon annual application, if the parent/guardian of a student under 18 years of age applies in writing to the principal for an exemption; or a student who is at least 18 years of age, applies in writing to the Principal to be exempted.

Please be advised I am requesting that my child, a student less than 18 years of age:

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Be exempt from:

- The singing of O Canada
- The Recitation of the Pledge of Citizenship

For the current school year.

Parent signature

Month: _____ Day: _____ Year: _____



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APPENDIX B: EXEMPTION REQUEST FORM: STUDENT

The principal will exempt students from the singing of “O Canada” and the recitation of the Pledge of Citizenship upon annual application, if the parent/guardian of a student under 18 years of age applies in writing to the principal for an exemption; or a student who is at least 18 years of age, applies in writing to the Principal to be exempted.

Please be advised I am student at least 18 years of age.

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

I am requesting that I be exempt from:

- The singing of O Canada
 - The Recitation of the Pledge of Citizenship
- For the current school year.

Signature

Month: _____ Day: _____ Year: _____