

Equity and Inclusive Education

Adopted:

January 18, 2011

Last Reviewed/Revised:

April 16, 2024

Next Scheduled Review: 2026-2027

Associated Policies & Procedures:

[VI-54 Equity and Inclusive Education](#)

[VI-60 Student Groups in Catholic Schools](#)

[I-43 Use of Technology and Digital Citizenship](#)

[VI-62 Use of Technology and Digital Citizenship](#)

[II-34 Participation in Programs and Courses of Study in Catholic Religious Education](#)

[II-39 Progressive Discipline and Safety in Schools Code of conduct – Suspensions and Expulsions](#)

[VI-44 Progressive Discipline and Safety in Schools](#)

[II-40 Bullying Prevention and Intervention](#)

[II-43 Voluntary Confidential Self-Identification of First Nation Metis and Inuit Students](#)

[V-01 Use of School Grounds and Community Use of School Facilities](#)

[VI-64 Community Use of School Facilities](#)

[V-03 Photography, Advertising and Sales Representatives](#)

[V-18 Community Engagement and Public Consultation Policy](#)

[VI-04 Complaints Resolution Process Workplace Discrimination Harassment Violence](#)

[VI-102 Responding to Hate or Bias Motivated Incidents Involving or Impacting Students](#)

Purpose

The Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) recognizes that all people are created equal, in the image of God, each with inimitable characteristics deserving of dignity (Genesis: 1:27). In accordance with the Church's teachings, it is the policy of HCDSB to provide in all its operations an educational environment which supports and fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion within its Catholic community.

HCDSB recognizes that any form of discrimination is incompatible with Catholic moral principles and is in violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code. HCDSB recognizes that the school system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, consistent with the protection afforded in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and confirmed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

HCDSB and its staff are committed to the elimination of systemic barriers as outlined in Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017) and the Ontario Ministry of Education (the "Ministry") and

Accepting Schools Act in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of HCDSB's denominational rights under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and as recognized at section 19 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

Application and Scope

The Equity and Inclusive Education Policy applies to all students, staff, volunteers and stakeholders of HCDSB.

Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (2013) "*Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*" identifies eight areas of focus for implementing equity and inclusive education. Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017) builds on previous strategies to articulate the following priority action areas for boards: School and Classroom Practices, Leadership, Governance and Human Resources and Data Collection, Integration and Reporting. Accepting School Act legislated elements of the Equity and Inclusive strategy and added to previous legislation regarding creating positive school climates that prevent bullying and associated disciplinary and supports protocols.

In accordance with the above policy documents, applicable legislation that outlines the denominational rights of the Catholic school system and with adherence to the *Guiding Principles of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, and consistent with the Human Rights Code, each area of focus will be introduced and anchored by a preamble and HCDSB's commitment. This will serve to guide the actions of HCDSB and its schools, in honouring its commitments to equity and inclusive education policy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

References

[Anti-Racism Act 2017](#)

[Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act \(2012\) Subsection 169.1](#)

[Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: Discovering the Unity of Life and Love: A reflection on the Foundations for a Theology of Human Love](#)

[Constitution Act, 1982: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

[Education Act](#)

[Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation \(2014\)](#)

[Nostrae Aetate](#)

[Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy](#)

[Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan \(2017\)](#)

[Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009 – Reflective Tool](#)

[Ontario Human Rights Code](#)

[Ontario Human Rights Code: Gender Identity and Gender Expression](#)

[PPM 108 Opening or Closing Exercises in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#)

[PPM 119 Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools \(2013\)](#)

[Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy \(2009\)](#)

Definitions

Anti-Black Racism - policies and practices rooted in Canadian institutions such as education, health care, and justice that mirror and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of African descent.

Creed - is interpreted as “religious creed” or “religion”. It is defined as a professed system and confession of faith, including both beliefs and observances of worship. Creed refers to the beliefs and practices that are sincerely held and/or observed. (Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances)

Denominational Rights - public funding of Ontario's Roman Catholic school system was agreed to at the time of Confederation and was part of the Constitution Act, 1867, Section 93. (Ontario's Ministry of Education).

Diversity - the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. (Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools, 2014)

Equity - a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. (Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools, 2014)

Inclusive Education - education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected. (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009)

Ontario Human Rights Code - the Code prohibits actions that discriminate against people based on a protected ground in a protected social area. Some of the protected grounds include ancestry, colour, race, citizenship, ethnic origin, place of origin, creed, disability, family status, marital status,

gender identity, gender expression, sex and sexual orientation. (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018)

Religious Accommodation - is a duty corresponding to the right to be free from discrimination. The Code refers to the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation for students and employees who wish to observe the tenets or practices of their faith (Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances)

Stakeholder - any individual or group who can affect or is affected by decisions made by HCDSB.

Systemic Barriers - institutional and instructional practices that negatively impact the achievement and wellbeing of students and lead to inequitable outcomes. Systemic barriers are caused by embedded biases in policies, practices and processes, and may result in differential treatment. (Ontario's Equity Action Plan, 2017)

Principles

- In accordance with the Church's teachings and Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, the following principles of equity and inclusive education will be upheld in all HCDSB operations. Equity and inclusion:
 - is a foundation of excellence;
 - meets individual needs;
 - identifies and eliminates barriers;
 - promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance
 - involves the broad community;
 - builds on and enhances previous and existing initiatives;
 - is demonstrated throughout the system.
- As outlined in Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy, the impact and consequences of Ontario's history have created systemic barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all parts of society, including education. The Strategy further emphasizes that Black Ontarians of all backgrounds and intersectional identities live a shared present-day experience of anti-Black racism. The enduring legacy of anti-Black racism in education and in HCDSB is evidenced through HCDSB's analysis of identity-based data, which highlight disparities in outcomes for Black students and staff in relation to their achievement and wellbeing.

1. HCDSB Policies, Programs, Procedures and Practices:

Preamble:

HCDSB recognizes the importance of anti-racism and anti-harassment policies in promoting and maintaining a Catholic educational and working environment which upholds human rights, equity and inclusion.

HCDSB will ensure that its policy review cycle will result in the alignment and integration of *The Strategy* and Accepting Schools Act with all HCDSB policies, programs, procedures, and practices. The perspectives of the entire diverse Catholic school community will be reflected in all areas of the teaching, learning and administrative culture. Every effort will be made to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit access to and opportunity for effective employment procedures for individuals from diverse communities and underrepresented peoples within the context of the denominational rights of Catholic school boards. In addition, HCDSB will embed positive principles of Equity and Inclusion in all of its policies and procedures.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to serving staff, students, and families in its diverse Catholic community by incorporating the principles of equity and inclusive education into all aspects of its policies, programs, procedures, and practices that are consistent with Catholic denominational rights.

2. Shared and Committed Leadership:**Preamble:**

HCDSB subscribes to an informed leadership philosophy that inspires, empowers, and supports all stakeholders in our Catholic community to join together to implement institutional practices and behaviours that foster equity and inclusion.

HCDSB recognizes the critical role of all leaders including Trustees, Superintendents, Principals, Teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, Child and Youth Counsellors, Social Workers, in fostering inclusive, safe and welcoming learning environments and upholding human rights.

HCDSB is committed to providing informed shared leadership to improve student achievement and to close achievement gaps for students by identifying, addressing, and removing all barriers and forms of discrimination.

HCDSB recognizes the critical connection between student leadership and improved student achievement and will strive to include students' perspectives in all aspects of the implementation of equity and inclusive education.

In accordance with the Ministry's Ontario Leadership Strategy, effective HCDSB and school leaders will encourage and promote a collaborative approach to all dimensions of equity and inclusive education, which ensures the participation of students, parents/guardians, unions, colleges and universities, service organizations and other community partners.

HCDSB recognizes that having a diverse teaching workforce is vital to serve the needs of all students and communities within the HCDSB. Inequitable representation of historically disadvantaged groups in the workforce can lead to inequities in the educational experience and outcomes for excluded or marginalized students.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of our diverse Catholic community so that the perspectives and experiences of all students are recognized and their needs are met.

3. School Community Relationships:**Preamble:**

HCDSB recognizes that the effective review, development, implementation and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies and practices requires the involvement of all members of the entire Catholic school community. HCDSB further recognizes the importance of engaging specialized expertise in developing and implementing its equity and inclusive education policy.

HCDSB will seek collaboration with and active engagement from students, parents/guardians, staff, and other Catholic community partners to create and sustain a positive school climate reflective of Catholic values that supports student achievement.

HCDSB acknowledges the importance of increasing parent/guardian engagement in equity and inclusive education with a focus on reaching out to parents/guardians who may be disengaged from the education system. HCDSB will identify, examine, and remove any barriers that exist, preventing full participatory school-community relations including obstacles associated with any systemic discrimination.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of our diverse Catholic community so that the perspectives and experiences of all students, families, and employees are recognized.

4. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices:**Preamble:**

Both in its content and methodology, inclusive curriculum seeks to recognize our commitment to Catholic values and to affirm the life experiences of all students based on their membership in a Code-protected ground and/or including socio-economic status.

Effective evaluation includes researched best practices that truly reflect the current level of achievement of the student. Multiple opportunities for assessment allow for student learning and accuracy of assessment and instruction.

Students must be represented in the curriculum. Students' perspective is fundamental in the planning for instruction and the accuracy of assessment.

HCDSB recognizes that strengthening inclusive and culturally responsive and relevant teaching, curriculum, assessment, and resources is essential to promoting student achievement and wellbeing and commits to advance culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy.

HCDSB is committed to ensuring that all students achieve their potential and are supported in choosing appropriate pathways that meet their aspirations.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to implementing an inclusive curriculum based on Catholic values and to reviewing resources, instruction, and assessment and evaluation practices in order to identify and address discriminatory biases so that each student may maximize her or his learning potential.

5. Religious Accommodation:

Preamble:

Committed to the mission of the Church, HCDSB provides a learning and working environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability, in accordance with the Ontario *Human Rights Code* and PPM 108.

Within the framework of gospel values, traditions, and HCDSB's denominational rights, in recognition of this diversity, HCDSB will take reasonable steps to provide reasonable accommodation for students' and staffs' religious beliefs and practices, while also protecting its denominational rights. (See Religious Accommodation Appendix "A" and "B" attached)

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to the values of freedom of religion and freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviour based on religion and will take all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations within the legal rights afforded to the Catholic school system.

6. School Climate and the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment:

Preamble:

HCDSB recognizes that a safe and welcoming environment is most conducive to learning. HCDSB will therefore seek to foster a Christ-centred, positive school climate, free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour. HCDSB acknowledges that a Christ-centered, positive school climate is one where all members of the school community feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. The principles of equity and inclusive education support positive student behaviour.

The principles of equity and inclusion are consistent with Catholic doctrine and must be considered and applied in employing progressive disciplinary measures, particularly when it is necessary to take into account mitigating and other factors (Policy II-40 Bullying Prevention and Intervention, Policy II-39 Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour and Administrative Procedure VI-44 Progressive Discipline for the operating policies that direct preventing and handling situations of bullying, discrimination and harassment).

HCDSB acknowledges its moral and legal responsibility to provide learning and working environments that are free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. Procedure VI-04 Complaints Resolution Process Workplace Discrimination Harassment Violence provides the framework for staff, visitors, guests and volunteers for processing and addressing workplace discrimination/harassment/violence complaints. Procedure VI-102 Responding to Hate or Bias Motivated Incidents Involving or Impacting Students provides a consistent, fair and transparent process for responding, reporting, documenting, remedying and preventing hate or bias motivated incidents impacting or involving students.

HCDSB is committed to providing an educational environment that is respectful of the human rights of staff, students and families. HCDSB recognizes the need for building a culture of respect for human rights by establishing and reviewing human rights policies and procedures, consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code and consistent with the exercise of HCDSB's denominational rights as outlined in section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

HCDSB recognizes the need for regular, ongoing training and accessible information on human rights, indigeneity, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression for staff and students to identify and eliminate systemic barriers and uphold a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment for all stakeholders.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to the principle that every person within the school community is entitled to a respectful, positive and Christ-centred school climate and learning environment, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.

7. Professional Learning:

Preamble:

The staff of HCDSB is its most important asset and is the vehicle by which Catholicity and equity are taught in the classroom and throughout the system. HCDSB, therefore, recognizes the importance of ongoing professional learning to create a foundation for Catholic values, ecclesial

and cultural identity, human rights education and effective teaching practices that promote equity and inclusion.

Professional learning increases the knowledge and skills that teachers bring to the craft and science of teaching, and, thus, engages the student with increasing complexity and precision teaching. Perpetual professional learning is the groundwork for positive changes in our schools. Professional learning must include knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Earl and Katz, 2005) to ensure that all perspectives are represented and that we recognize that there is no essential knowledge but rather a continued quest towards deeper representation of all with our knowledge base.

Distributed, deep and sustained changes in practice and structures in school are key elements of professional learning and have impact on student learning, engagement and success in a knowledge society (Earl and Katz, 2005). Professional Learning works to engage all learners and strives for student success and includes the following:

- a) Changes in thinking and practices of teachers
- b) Collaborative inquiry at various levels within the school
- c) Pursuit of innovation (Katz, Earl and Jaafar, 2009)

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to providing the school community, including students, with ongoing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and systemic barriers under the *Code*, and strategies for promoting positive school climates.

8. Accountability and Transparency

Preamble:

HCDSB acknowledges and assumes the responsibility for its policies, actions, and decisions. In the pursuit of greater transparency and accountability, HCDSB, in respectful collaboration and communication with the whole Catholic school community, will report on its goals and progress in the areas of policy review, school improvement planning and the implementation of *The Strategy*. In accordance with Accepting School Act, HCDSB will survey parents/guardians, staff and students once every two (2) years through the School Climate Survey data collection initiative which includes a section on equity and inclusion.

Our Commitment:

HCDSB is committed to assessing and monitoring its progress in implementing *The Strategy*; to embedding the principles of Equity and Inclusive Education into all HCDSB policies, programs, guidelines and practices; and to communicating these results to the community.

The Director of Education will develop procedures required to implement this policy and provide an annual report to the Board of Trustees on the efficacy of the related policies, procedures and programs. HCDSB multi-year plans will include the goals set out in Accepting Schools Act around positive school climate and bullying prevention as it relates to Equity and inclusion along with supports for students and awareness opportunities for parents/guardians.

Data Collection, Integration and Reporting

HCDSB supports the need for collecting and analyzing voluntary student demographic data and perceptual data to address barriers to student success.

As mandated by the Anti-Racism Act 2017, HCDSB commits to student demographic data collection to identify and eliminate disproportionalities and disparities in student achievement and wellbeing (e.g. graduation, suspensions and expulsions, program enrolment).

HCDSB recognizes that collection and analysis of staff demographic data at all levels along with identification and removal of systemic barriers consistent with HCDSB's denominational rights, is required for equitable recruitment, hiring, promotion and professional development strategies. Enhanced data collection and outcome measurement support evidence-based decision making.

All data collection, research, surveys and census will be developed, collected and disseminated using an equity and inclusion lens – to ensure participation and representation of individuals from diverse communities.

Requirements

Information and Instruction with Respect to Equity and Inclusive Education Policy:

HCDSB will provide staff with information and instruction that is appropriate for the employee on the contents of the policy.

Responsibility

The Director of Education holds primary responsibility for overseeing and implementing this policy.

APPROVED: Regular Meeting of the Board

AUTHORIZED BY: _____
Chair of the Board

Religious Accommodation Guideline

Appendix "A"

MISSION STATEMENT

The Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) 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. Such accommodations will be provided to staff, students and their families.

INTRODUCTION

HCDSB believes in the dignity of all people and their equality as children of God. The HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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/guardians 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 HCDSB, 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".

HCDSB 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").

HCDSB 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 policy reflects the HCDSB's fidelity to Canadian law protecting freedom of religion in accordance with the Catholic Church's teachings.

II. 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 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).

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. For more information about the evidence needed to prove undue hardship, see *Human Rights at Work*, p. 133-134 and accompanying Appendix E.

A determination that an accommodation will create undue hardship carries with it significant liability for the HCDSB. It should be made only with the approval of the appropriate Supervisory Officer or where appropriate the Board of Trustees.

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. The accommodation seeker shall be informed of his or her recourse under the HCDSB's Equity and Inclusive Education Policy and Anti-Discrimination Policy and Procedure, and under the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

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

III. Accommodation Guidelines

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure that all HCDSB staff, students, parents/guardians 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 HCDSB'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.

HCDSB 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. HCDSB will work cooperatively, and in a spirit of respect, with all partners in the accommodation process.

1. Accommodation Based on Request:

HCDSB 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.

HCDSB will base its decision to accommodate by applying the *Code*'s criteria of undue hardship, the HCDSB's ability to fulfill its duties under HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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 student's compliance with a religious obligation, and enforcing such practices, e.g. wearing a head covering is not the responsibility of the school or the HCDSB.

2. General Procedures for Religious Accommodation:

a. 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.

b. 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/guardian 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/guardians to understand.

3. Unresolved Requests:

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

4. Areas of Accommodation:

For many students and staff of the HCDSB, 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 HCDSB. 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.

IV. 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 PPM 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.

PPM 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/guardians 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 HCDSB will consider other requests for accommodation as may be made.

2. Absence for Religious Holy Days:

HCDSB 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.

HCDSB will encourage members of diverse groups to identify their religious holy days at the beginning of each school year. HCDSB 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:	
<i>Indigenous Heritage Days</i>	Indigenous spiritual observances vary based on the moon cycle and seasonal changes from Indigenous Nation to Nation. Examples include mid-Winter ceremony (8 days) and Harvest (4 days) for Haudenosaunee
<i>Baha’i</i>	Ridvan
<i>Buddhist</i>	Lunar New Year/Chinese
<i>Western Christian</i>	Good Friday
<i>Eastern Christian</i>	Christmas Holy Friday
<i>Hindu</i>	Diwali
<i>Jewish</i>	Rosh Hashanah (2 days) Yom Kippur Passover (first day)
<i>Muslim</i>	Eid-ul-Fitr Eid-ul-Adha
<i>Sikh</i>	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 HCDSB on other organizations, which in partnership with the HCDSB are planning events or activities that involve students and/or staff of HCDSB 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 HCDSB's Equity Officer.

Unresolved Requests:

a. 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, Human Resources Services.

b. Students

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

3. Prayer:

HCDSB recognizes the significance of prayer in religious practice. HCDSB 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:

HCDSB 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:

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

HCDSB recognizes that there are certain religious communities that require specific items of ceremonial dress. The HCDSB understands that some religious attire, which is a requirement of religious observance, may not conform to a school’s Dress Code. HCDSB 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 HCDSB schools includes, but is not limited to:

- Head covers: Yarmulkes, turbans, Rastafarian headdress, hijabs
- Crucifixes, Stars of David, etc.
- Items of ceremonial dress

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 HCDSB policies as part of an inclusive design process.

HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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 Appendix “B”.

7. Modesty Requirements for Dress in Physical Education Classes:

HCDSB 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:

HCDSB 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 HCDSB 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).

In general, the HCDSB 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 their family.

V. Limitations to Religious Accommodation

1. HCDSB supports freedom of religion and an individual's right to manifest their religious beliefs and observances. The right to freedom of religion, however, is not absolute and religious accommodation in the HCDSB is carried out in the larger context of the Catholic education system and denominational rights of Catholic schools.
2. HCDSB, 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.

GUIDELINE FOR KIRPAN ACCOMMODATION

A Kirpan is a ceremonial sword that must be worn by all baptized Khalsa Sikhs. The HCDSB seeks to accommodate Khalsa Sikhs who wear a Kirpan under the following conditions as follows:

- At the beginning of the school year or upon registration, the student and parents/guardians must report to their respective school administration that they are Khalsa Sikhs and wear the five articles of faith, including a Kirpan.

The Principal, in consultation with the student and their parents/guardians, will develop appropriate accommodations to allow the student to wear the Kirpan while ensuring the safety of others. These may include the following conditions:

- The Kirpan is six inches or less.
- The Kirpan will be sufficiently secured with a stitched flap so it is not easily removed from its sheath.
- The Kirpan will not be worn visibly, but under the wearer’s clothing.
- There is notification in writing to the Principal by the parents/guardians and student and, where possible, from the Gurdwara (place of worship), confirming that the student requesting accommodation is a Khalsa Sikh.
- Students under the age of eighteen must be accompanied by parents/guardians when discussing the rules regarding the wearing of a Kirpan.