

1.0. School Administration

1.A. General

1.A. RELEASE TIME FOR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND/OR EXERCISES

Adopted: September 12, 2000

Reviewed by Committee: February 24, 2009, September 27, 2016

Policy Reference: EL-1.6

Religious Instruction

In accordance with the decision of the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench, religious instruction may be conducted during the school day when:

- a petition is presented to the Board and signed by the parents or guardians of at least 10 children attending schools having one or two classrooms
- or the parents or guardians of at least 25 children attending schools having three or more classrooms

Religious groups will make their own arrangements for teachers of religious classes.

Lakeshore teachers are not expected to provide the religious instruction, but must provide activities for students not participating.

Religious Exercises

In accordance with the decision of the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench, religious exercises may be conducted during the school day when:

Where petitioned, religious exercises are to be held each teaching day, and shall be no longer than ten minutes in duration. The exercises are not to be held during regular instructional time. Instructional time is to be preserved and religious exercises held either prior to the start of the school day or during noon recess.

Once religious exercises are instituted by petition in a school, only those children whose parents/guardians have signed the petition may participate. It is reasonable for schools to advise parents, through school newsletters or other means, that religious exercises are in place in the school and that those parents wishing to have their children participate can do so by notifying the principal. (This might mean having the parents come to the school to sign the petition, or indicate consent by sending a signed letter to the principal as an attachment to the petition). It must not be assumed that those parents/guardians who did not sign the petition want their children to participate in religious exercises and can remove their children if they do not want them to participate. It must be an **opt-in** process.

Similarly, though it may be administratively convenient, schools should not send out ballots to parents/guardians to record whether or not they wish their children to participate in religious exercises.

Petitions respecting religious exercises must be received by the school board each school year, and be on a school by school basis.

The content of any religious exercise must be defined by those petitioning for it. It is important that those persons being approached to sign the petition know exactly what they are being asked to sign, and that the school board clearly understands what is being requested.

Assuming the numerical requirements of subsection 84(8) are met, it is conceivable that parents of a variety of faith groups could petition for their own religious exercises. In other words, provided the requirements of subsection 84(8) are met, parents could petition for Buddhist religious exercises, Jewish religious exercises, Christian religious exercises, or other. Parents or guardians signatory to a petition would be entitled to have their children access such religious exercises, and the school board and school will be required to make the necessary arrangements to implement the exercises. However, the parents/guardians making the petition will be responsible for providing whatever prayer book, literature, etc., are essential to the conducting of the religious exercises.

Teachers and other staff are not compelled to conduct or supervise religious exercises. Participation by staff must be voluntary. If teachers and other staff are unwilling to conduct or supervise such exercises, alternate arrangements must be made. This may involve requesting members of the parents' group petitioning for the exercises to conduct the activity themselves. The principal will be responsible for determining the appropriate supervisory arrangements.

School boards shall not, as part of the hiring or promotion process, inquire of applicants/candidates as to their willingness to participate in, conduct, or supervise religious exercises.

By holding religious exercises before the beginning of regular classes in the morning, or during the noon hour, the separation of participating and nonparticipating students can be minimized. It is recommended that those participating in religious exercises congregate in a common area (gymnasium, multi-purpose room, empty classroom, etc.), proceed with the exercises and then rejoin their classmates prior to the class which they are scheduled to attend.

Non-participating students should not be asked to relocate to accommodate religious exercises.

In each case, a by-law must be passed by the Board.