



Religious Exercises

Administrative Procedure 1.A.120

Board Governance Policy Cross Reference: 1, 2, 3, 16

Legal Reference: Public Schools Act (84)

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Religious exercises may only be conducted where a petition asking for such exercises (signed by the parents/guardians of 75% of the students in the case of a school having fewer than 80 students or by the parents/guardians of at least 60 students in schools having an enrolment of 80 or more students) is presented to the school board.

It is the expectation of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth that school divisions/districts will follow these guidelines:

1. Religious exercises are to be conducted in a particular school only after the requirements of subsection 84(8) of *The Public Schools Act* have been met, a petition has been directed to the local school board, and the school board instructs that school to make the necessary arrangements.
2. School boards may, for the purpose of communicating information, advise parents/guardians prior to the start of the school year of the provisions of subsection 84(8) of *The Public Schools Act*. The guidelines may be shared with parents/guardians to facilitate their understanding of the law, and to explain the process necessary for implementation of religious exercises. School boards should not, however, take any action that would be seen as initiating or prompting implementation of religious exercises. The process must be grass roots driven, with parents/guardians taking the initiative to have religious exercises implemented. Schools should play no role in the petition process, and act on a petition only when so advised by the school board.
3. 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.

4. Petitions respecting religious exercises must be received by the school board each school year, and be on a school by school basis.
5. 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. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.
8. 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.

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