



Guidelines for Secondary School Religious Education and Religious Activities Exemptions

“Catholic schools must be places where students can hear Jesus’ invitation to follow Him, where they can receive His command to love all people, and where they can realize His presence and His promise to be with them always. Only in this way can they be nurtured and encouraged to become who they are meant to be: persons of dignity and freedom, created in the image and likeness of God as modeled in Jesus Christ.” *Institute for Catholic Education*

The Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB), with the exception of allowances provided for by the Ministry of Education, the *Education Act*, *The Ontario Human Rights Code* or by these Guidelines, intends that all full time students who are enrolled in a HSCDSB secondary school will take a prescribed credit course in Religious Education in each of their four years of attendance.

Resources

[Education Act. R.S.O. 1990](#)

[The Ontario Human Rights Code. R.S.O. 1990](#)

[Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board](#)



Overview and Considerations for Religious Education and Religious Activities Exemptions

Students registering in a secondary school in HSCDSB will be required to register for one religion course in each year of attendance.

Students enrolled in a Catholic school are expected to participate fully in the faith life of the school which includes any religious program, course or activity with a substantial component of religious content (i.e., liturgies, masses, retreats, etc.).

Registration forms will show religion as a compulsory course in each of the four years. Students must select a religion course on their registration form unless they request and receive an exemption under the *Education Act*.

The *Education Act* provides for the following exemption from religious courses and programs for “open access” students:

“[...] no person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board shall be required to take part in any program or course of study in religious education on written application to HSCDSB of,

- a) the parent or guardian of the person;
- b) in the case of a person who is 16 or 17 years old who has withdrawn from parental control, the person himself or herself;
- c) in the case of a person who is 18 years or older, the person himself or herself.”

“Open access” students are “persons who are qualified to be resident pupils in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attend a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic Board”. In other words, “open access” students are students who attend a Catholic secondary school, but whose parents are public school supporters. A student’s qualification for resident pupil status is based solely on the location of the student and parent/guardian’s residence, and the school board of which the parent/guardian or student (if 18 years or older, or 17 or 17 and withdrawn) is a supporter. If a student satisfies both the residency and supporter criteria, he or she will qualify as a resident pupil and, if attending a Catholic secondary school, will be eligible to be exempt from religious courses of study and programs.

Students who are not “open access” students are not eligible to obtain a religious exemption under the *Education Act*.

To assist students, parents or guardians in making a written application for an exemption, a standardized exemption application eligibility form shall be made available to students, with information requirements that are sufficient to determine the student's eligibility to the exemption under subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*. The form will also include a general list of programs, activities or course(s) of study that are eligible for the exemption and which the student can select.

Students have the right to request an exemption from any specific religious program, course or activity while retaining the right to participate in other religious programs, courses or activities.

Upon receipt of a completed standardized form, the school will assess the student's eligibility for an exemption. Once the student's eligibility is confirmed, the exemption will be provided by the school without delay, pressure or other adverse treatment.

The exemption may apply to religious programs, courses or activities with a substantial component of religious content. For example, exempted students may not be required to participate in prayer and liturgical activities, nor required to attend religious observances. The school should produce a list of religious programs, courses or activities to which the exemption may apply, and the list should accompany the standardized form. Students, parents or guardians may also question whether other courses, programs or activities are religious education for the purposes of subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*.

Students with exemptions will be given the opportunity to take alternative course or program offerings to the extent reasonably possible in line with ordinary course selection procedures. At the student's request, the school will work with the student to provide information to assist him or her in making an informed decision.

Students with exemptions from religious courses and activities will be treated with dignity and respect.

All exemption requests should be referred to the Principal, who will then forward the Superintendent. The Superintendent will inform the student, parent, or guardian, as applicable, of the eligibility for exemption in accordance with these procedures and the *Education Act*, in writing and in a timely manner.



**Secondary School Religious Education and
Religious Activities Exemption Request
Application**

This form must be completed in full and returned along with the appropriate documents to the Superintendent with oversight of this process.

Application must be received before the start of the semester.
Requests are considered on an annual basis.

STUDENT INFORMATION		
First Name:	Middle Name:	Last Name:
Date of Birth: (d /m /y)	Grade: School Year:	Phone:
Home Address:		
City:	Province:	Postal Code:
Previous Elementary School(s):		How Long?
Previous Secondary School(s):		How Long?
PARENT/GUARDIAN/ADULT STUDENT MAKING APPLICATION		
Application Date:		
Parent/Guardian #1:		Signature:
Address:		
City:	Province:	Postal Code:
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	Bus. Phone:
Parent/Guardian #2:		Signature:
City:	Province:	Postal Code:
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	Bus. Phone:
APPLICANT: ATTACH THE FOLLOWING TO APPLICATION AND SUBMIT TO PRINCIPAL		
<input type="checkbox"/> Latest Municipal Tax Assessment (MPAC)	<input type="checkbox"/> ENG - SEPARATE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENG - PUBLIC

APPLICANT: SELECT THE COURSES AND ACTIVITIES YOU WISH TO BE EXEMPT FROM (CHECK ONE)

- Religion Course Only
- Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer (i.e Masses, Liturgies, Retreats)
- Religious Course and Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer (i.e Masses, Liturgies, Retreats)
- Other: _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL

Principal Signature:

Date:

BOARD OFFICE ONLY

Superintendent Decision:

Signature:

Eligible [] Not Eligible []

Date: