

MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC BOARD OF EDUCATION OPERATES AS MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC SCHOOL DIVISION, AND FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE REFERRED TO AS "MHPSD" AND/OR "DIVISION"

SECTION 700 – Educational Program

POLICY 704: RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION, EXERCISES AND ACTIVITIES

BACKGROUND

The Board of Trustees acknowledges that a diversity of religious belief exists within the community and among the students served by Medicine Hat Public School Division (MHPSD). It is the desire of the Board of Trustees to promote religious tolerance, to acknowledge religious diversity, to establish and maintain inclusive environments in schools, and to provide appropriate opportunities for students to give expression to their religious beliefs. Accordingly, the school principal shall promote a school atmosphere that supports inclusion and that respects the diversity of religious belief which exists among students.

POLICY

The School Act (s 50) provides opportunity for a School Board to prescribe religious instruction and/or religious exercises for its students. The Board of Trustees expects, therefore, that religious instruction and/or exercises in Board of Trustees-operated schools will occur only when prescribed by the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees, in order to avoid the teaching of any particular religious doctrine or creed, to promote religious inclusion and tolerance, and to acknowledge the diversity of religious belief that exists among its students, does not prescribe religious instruction and/or religious exercises in its schools, with the exception of religious instruction and/or exercises that occur in the context of religious alternative programs that have been established by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Board Policy and the provisions of the School Act (s.21). Furthermore, the Board of Trustees endorses the offering of provincially authorized courses of student such as Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meanings 20, and World Religions 30 (where sufficient interest exists to warrant the offering of such courses), as well as instruction about religion for the purpose of understanding current events, history, geography, culture, etc.

The above notwithstanding, the Board of Trustees recognizes that many day-to-day school activities may be considered to be of a religious nature, or may be perceived to include a religious element. These include activities of both an instructional and non-instructional nature. Such activities provide valuable learning and cultural opportunities for students, serve to acknowledge the religious diversity which exists among students, and provide students with opportunity to express their personal spirituality and religious beliefs.

GUIDELINES

The following are illustrative of activities that may be considered to be of a religious nature and which are permitted in Division Schools:

1. A moment of silence at the beginning or end of a school day, or at a special event such as a Remembrance Day ceremony.
2. Student participation in extra-curricular activities such as religious clubs.
3. Ceremonial prayer at special events such as graduation exercises, aboriginal awards ceremonies, etc.
4. The performance of musical or dramatic selections with religious themes or content, with the understanding that the performance is not intended to be a religious exercise.
5. Distribution of religious literature (i.e. "sacred books") to those students who parents have provided written consent for their children to receive such literature.
6. The placement in schools of religious symbols or illustrations associated with special events, celebrations, or festivals.
7. Memorial services in remembrance of staff or students.
8. The Principals of a school may, in consultation with the School Council and as directed by the School Board, provide for:
 - 8.1. the recitation of the Lord's prayer at opening exercises;
 - 8.2. concerts and activities in observance of seasonal Christian events; and
 - 8.3. activities of a religious nature associated with the study of other cultures.

In accordance with the provisions of the School Act, upon request from a parent, a student shall be excused from activities that are considered by the parent to be religious in nature.

REFERENCES

Alberta Education – School Act

Approved: December 17, 2003

Revised: _____

