

OPENING EXERCISES

Background

The Division exercises the discretionary authority granted to it through the Education Act in establishing procedures inclusive of its diversity and embrace pluralism and multiculturalism.

The Division's strength is in its diversity. School boards have an obligation to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, including those who hold religious beliefs, and they should seek to reasonably accommodate the beliefs of all students.

Individuals have freedom of conscience, religion, and expression so their private choice to engage in prayer is protected by the Charter. Any such expression is to be voluntary. Privileging one religion over the others continues to reinforce the dominant narrative of society. This privilege also often stigmatizes and singles out those children who seek an opt-out clause to be excused from saying the prayer.

The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action include respecting Indigenous people's right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practice, develop and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies.

Procedures

1. It is accepted that opening exercises will be conducted at the beginning of the school day.
2. Principals will discuss the nature of school opening exercises with the School Community Council and will ensure exercises are inclusive for all students.
3. Opening exercise procedures will be communicated to the Superintendent of Operations.
4. It is encouraged that the following exercises be carried out:
 - 4.1 The playing of 'O Canada' by the school or individual classes.
 - 4.2 Moments of silent reflection, where students can choose to pray in a way that is foundational to their beliefs, meditate, and/or to set intentions for the day.
5. When a parent of a student requests that the student be excluded from opening exercises, the teacher or other person shall permit the student:
 - 5.1 To leave the classroom or place where the exercises are taking place for the duration of the exercises, or
 - 5.2 To remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the exercises.

Reference: Section 85, 87, 175, 182, 184, Education Act

Reviewed: August 2015, Updated: March 2022