

Administrative Procedure 3130

Religious Instruction/Religious Exercises

Board Governance Policy Cross Reference: [1, 12, 13](#)

Administrative Procedures Cross Reference:

Form Cross Reference:

Legal/Regulatory Reference:

[The Public Schools Act](#), sections 80-83, section 84(1), (8)

[Manitoba Regulation 554/88](#), sections 1, 3, 4(2), 4(3)

The Interlake School Division recognizes and respects the fact that families who register their children in schools in the Division have different religious beliefs and practices. The [Public Schools Act](#) states that public schools shall be non-sectarian.

As such, religious exercises may only be conducted where a petition asking for such exercises is presented to the school board. Instruction in religion may be conducted in any school in Manitoba if authorized by a by-law passed by the school board.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between religious exercises and religious instruction. The following guidelines will apply:

A. Religious Instruction

1. Instruction in religion may be conducted in any school if authorized by a by-law passed by the school board in that school year.
2. A petition for religious instruction at a given school must be parent/guardian, not organization, initiated. This petition must meet the guidelines set out in The Public Schools Act Section 80(2) and must be registered with the school board.
3. The parents or guardians of at least 10 children attending a school having one or two classrooms must sign the petition. For a school having three or more classrooms the parents or guardians of at least 25 children attending the school must sign the petition.
4. A letter from the Superintendent/CEO will be forwarded upon **approval** of the petition by the board of trustees.

5. Authorized religious instruction may take place during school hours and on such days as approved by the school board by-law but shall not exceed 2 1/2 hours per week. The instruction shall be conducted by a clergyman, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader or by a representative of parents recognized by the school board as constituting a religious group or by any person including a teacher, duly authorized by such clergyman, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader.
6. Where the parent or guardian of a pupil who is under the age of majority does not want the child to participate in the religious instruction or where an age of majority student does not want to participate in the religious instruction, they must be excused from participating therein.

B. Religious Exercises

1. Religious exercises may be conducted in any school in that school year only after the requirements set out in subsection 84(8) of [The Public Schools Act](#) have been met.
2. A petition must be 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. The petition must be **registered** with the school board.
3. A petition for religious exercises at a given school must be parent/guardian, not school initiated. Schools 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.
4. A letter from the Superintendent/CEO will be forwarded to the Principal upon filing of the petition with the board.
5. Petitions respecting religious exercises must be received by the school board each school year and be on a school by school basis.
6. 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 “Yes/No” ballots to parents/guardians to record whether or not they wish their children to participate in religious exercises.
7. 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.

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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. By holding religious exercises before the beginning of regular classes in the morning, or during the noon hour, the separation of participating and non-participating 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.