



REPORT TO

## GOVERNANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

### APPENDIX B S.S. 02 OPENING AND CLOSING EXERCISES POLICY REPORT.DOCX

*Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.  
Psalm 95:2*

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Loretta Notten, Superintendent of Governance and Policy

#### RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**Vision:**

*At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*

**Mission:**

*The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community rooted in the love of Christ. We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge and to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.*



G. Poole  
Associate Director of Academic Affairs

A. Sangiorgio  
Associate Director of Planning and  
Facilities

Angela Gauthier  
Director of Education

## **A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The process of commencing each school day in prayer and with the national anthem speaks to our proud Catholic faith tradition and our desire to cultivate strong national pride. The policy for Opening and Closing Exercises was last revised in 2002. In order to be consistent with Board motions regarding the singing of O Canada, Ministry of Education Policy Memorandums in relation to religious accommodation and the development of the TCDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan, it was necessary to revise our current policy.

## **B. PURPOSE**

1. Board policies must be aligned with changes in Ministry policy and all changes in legislation, and congruent with TCDSB Board approved motions. As part of a review of the TCDSB Policy register, our policy for Opening and Closing Exercises has been revised to reflect recent Ministry policy and legislative requirements and the goals of our Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

## **C. BACKGROUND**

1. Each of the schools of the TCDSB promotes and celebrates our Catholic faith by ensuring that prayer, scripture reading or religious reflection is integral to the Opening and/or Closing Exercises of the school day. Similarly, all schools cultivate a strong sense of national pride and identity by including the national anthem in their Opening Exercises.
2. On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012 the Board of Trustees passed a motion regarding the singing of O Canada, requesting that the policy and practice be changed to require students to sing O Canada a cappella. Practice in schools has largely changed to reflect the motion but policy had not be adequately updated.
3. While the Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination and provides equal treatment for all people in Ontario with respect to a number of categories, Section 19 recognizes that the Code will not be construed to adversely affect any right or privilege respecting separate schools enjoyed by separate school boards or their supporters under the constitution Act, 1867 and the Education Act.

4. School Boards have an obligation under the Ontario Human Rights Code to provide reasonable accommodation for students and employees who wish to observe the tenets or practices of their faith, as well as for those who wish not to participate in any form of religious observance.
5. Students over the age of 18 or the parent/guardian of a student under the age of 18 has the right to request an exemption from the requirement to sing O Canada or recite the pledge of citizenship (where used as part of Opening or closing exercises), per Regulation 298. 4 (4) and 435/00 of *The Education Act*.

## **D. VISION**

<b>VISION</b>	<b>PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>GOALS</b>
Provide a policy to govern TCDSB Opening and Closing Exercises that is respectful of our legal obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and PPM 119, as well as the Safe and Accepting Schools Act.	Aligns with the MYSP goals of Living Our Values, Fostering Student Achievement and Well-Being and Strengthening Public Confidence.	Newly revised policy consistent with the MYSP Policy Template. Clearly understood obligations articulated in TCDSB policy reflective of Ministry policy and the Ontario Human Rights Code. Clearly understood policy respectful of Board motion regarding the singing of O Canada.

## **E. ACTION PLAN**

1. The policy has been revised to provide a policy which is aligned with other TCDSB Policies in relation to prayer and religious accommodation, and to our obligations under Ministry Policy Memorandum, and the Ontario Human Rights code.

2. Students will have an authentic experience of prayer and their faith in each school day.
3. Students will commence each day singing O Canada a cappella respectful of the Board motion stating the same.
4. Policy revision reflects the goals of our TCDSB Multi-year Strategic Plan and the principles of our Catholic Graduate Expectations, in order to build and sustain a positive, faith-filled, inclusive school climate.
5. TCDSB will, at all times, seek to accommodate an individual's right to freedom of religion in a manner that not only respects the individual's beliefs, but the principles of the Catholic Church.
6. Religious accommodation will be provided per the individual rights and responsibilities provided under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

## **F. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. Implementation of the Opening and Closing Exercises policy is the responsibility of the school principal, in consultation with the Area Superintendent.
2. The consistent application of religious accommodation requests will be monitored and reported in an annual report to the Board of Trustees.

## **G. IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

1. Policy updates will be provided to all school administrators and published to the TCDSB Policy Register.

## **H. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

That the board approve the revised S.S. 02 Opening and Closing Exercises Policy, per Appendix A.