



**Catholic Secondary Schools Religious Studies Courses -
Requests for Exemption**

200.43

Adopted:	June 14, 2012
Last Reviewed/Revised:	January 11, 2021
Responsibility:	Superintendent of Education
Next Scheduled Review:	2024-2025

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Administrative Procedure is to provide direction to secondary vice-principals, principals, superintendents, and the Director of Education in relation to requests by parents/guardians and students to be exempted from taking Religious Studies Courses at one of our Catholic secondary schools

APPLICATION AND SCOPE:

All students registered in Catholic Secondary Schools are required to take at least one Religious Studies Course in each year unless they have completed Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 Religious Studies Courses (e.g., for fifth year students).

Students enrolled in Catholic Secondary Schools are expected to participate fully in the faith-life of the school (including daily prayer, masses, and Campus Ministry activities).

All teachers in a Catholic Secondary School shall incorporate the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations into every course that is being taught.

Only students who have successfully completed Religious Studies courses in each of Grades 9 through 12 shall be eligible to receive a Catholic Secondary School Diploma. To be eligible for any award of merit, a student must have successfully completed a Religious Studies Course for the year they are being recognized.

Subsection 42(11-13) of the Education Act provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “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”. This exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. Thus, if a student is a Catholic student who attended Catholic elementary school, they would not meet the requirement warranting an exemption.

REFERENCES:

- [Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations](#)
- [The Education Act and Regulations](#)

FORMS:

- Appendix A – Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Vice-Principals
- Appendix B – Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Principals
- Appendix C – Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Superintendents
- Appendix D – Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Director
- Appendix E – Sample Letter for Religious Studies Exemption for Principals – Does Not Qualify for Exemption
- Appendix F – Sample Letter for Religious Studies Exemption for Principals – Does Qualify for Exemption Refer

DEFINITIONS: N/A



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES:

It is the responsibility of principals and vice-principals to be the first line of communication with parents and students regarding requests for exemptions by parents or students from taking Religious Studies courses. Superintendents and the Director of Education play key roles in working with families through the consultation phases of the process for requesting exemptions.

As a means of helping to clarify the school and the Board's position regarding the program offered at our Catholic Secondary Schools, it is necessary to engage in an application process that ensures the applicant is fully aware of the impact that an exemption from Religious Studies may have, as well as the mission and purpose of Catholic schools.

No request for exemptions to Religious Studies Courses shall be processed until all phases of the application process have been completed.

1.0 Registration

To be considered for an exemption, the student must first be registered at a Catholic Secondary School in the appropriate boundary area.

2.0 Application

For an application to be made, a written request must be received by the secondary school principal prior to the beginning of a semester from which the exemption is being requested from the parent/guardian or adult student (the applicant). The written request must include the reason(s) for the request to help facilitate further discussions regarding the impact that the exemption may have on the student.

3.0 Information Meetings

Once the application has been received by the school principal, the principal shall set up a meeting between the applicant and the appropriate vice-principal. The vice-principal shall use the appropriate meeting checklist as a guide for the discussion (Appendix A).

After the meeting with the vice-principal has been completed and only if the applicant wishes to pursue the application, the vice-principal shall set up a meeting between the applicant and the principal of the school. The principal shall use the appropriate meeting checklist (Appendix B) and send a follow-up letter to the parent after the meeting (Appendix E or Appendix F).

After the meeting with the principal has been completed and only if the applicant wishes to pursue the application, the principal shall set up a meeting between the applicant and the school superintendent. The superintendent shall use the appropriate meeting checklist (Appendix C).

After the meeting with the superintendent has been completed and only if the applicant wishes to pursue the application, the superintendent shall set up a meeting between the applicant and the Director of Education. The Director of Education shall use the appropriate meeting checklist (Appendix D).



Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Vice-Principals

At the meeting, the vice-principal should cover the following:

- The expectation in the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board is that all students who attend a secondary school in the system enroll in one religion course for each year of attendance.
- Ensure that the student is an open access student who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board (that the student comes from a public-school board that was not Catholic). If not, then they can be informed that they are not eligible for the exemption.
- Parent is questioned regarding why a Catholic high school was chosen for the student's post elementary destination.
- Catholic high schools provide students with an education that includes emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth.
- Students in Catholic high schools are guided by the Ontario Catholic School Graduates Expectations, which includes religious education.
- Exclusion from faith formation is not in keeping with the expectations of students who graduate from Catholic schools.
- Catholic schools promote inclusion and non-Catholic students are invited to attend Catholic secondary schools but are expected to include themselves in the core faith program and activities related to the faith life of the school.
- Curriculum in all subject areas is infused with the beliefs and tenets of the Catholic faith and therefore, students will receive curricula enriched by the teachings of the Catholic faith in all classes.
- Religion courses are only one aspect of faith formation; all students are expected to participate in all religious activities in the school community including Masses, prayer services and retreats, which may be included as part of any subject area.
- Catholic schools will provide students with a comprehensive religion program that will influence and mold their lives into the future.
- Content of religion courses:
 - Grade Nine: assists students in understanding, within the context of their own lives, both the joys and the demands of following in the way of Christ and living out the Catholic faith using the Beatitudes and virtues as touchstones.
 - Grade Ten: assists students, with the help of the Gospel, to participate as Christians in the shaping of our culture through exploring major cultural issues from a Christ centered perspective.
 - Grade Eleven: strengthens and supports students' Catholic faith through an exploration of the major religious traditions of the world.
 - Grade Twelve: assists students to understand themselves as moral persons living the way of Christ through an examination of ethical theories, the revelation of sacred Scripture, and the experience and teaching of the Catholic Church

Registration form should be presented, and religion course selected.

If parents do not want to select a course, they should be counselled to either register in a non-Catholic secondary school or seek an appointment with the school principal.



Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Principals

- The principal should first confirm that the parents have previously spoken with a vice-principal.
- The principal should review the content presented at the meeting with the vice-principal.
- Ensure that the student is an open access student who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board (that the student comes from a public-school board that was not Catholic). If not, then they can be informed that they are not eligible for the exemption.
- The principal should further question why the parent is choosing a Catholic school if they are not choosing to participate in the religion program.

Potential questions to include:

- Why are you choosing/or have chosen this school for your child?
- Why are you choosing to educate your child in a school based on the Catholic faith when you do not want your child to participate in religion courses and /or activities based on this faith?
- Do you understand that inclusion in this school district means inclusion in the Catholic life of the school, which includes religion courses in each year of attendance and participating in all other religious activities (Masses, prayer services, retreats)?
- Registration form should be presented, and religion course selected. If parent does not select a religion course, he or she should be informed that the student will not be registered at the school.

If parent raises the issue of religion exemption, expectation should be restated (all students are expected to enroll in one religion course for each year of attendance). If parent asks for next recourse, they should be directed to a superintendent of education.

- Principal will send letter to parent outlining expectations for attendance in a Catholic secondary school.



Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Superintendents

- Superintendent should confirm prior to meeting with parent that a meeting has been conducted with the vice-principal and the principal.
- Superintendent will ask parent to review the content of the meetings with the vice-principal and principal. Parent should be questioned as to whether they understand the expectations as they were presented.
- Ensure that the student is an open access student who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board (that the student comes from a public-school board that was not Catholic). If not, then they can be informed that they are not eligible for the exemption.
- Superintendent should review the expectations for attendance in a secondary school in the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board.
- Superintendent should further question the choice of a Catholic school if parent or student is not willing to enroll in religion courses and/or faith life of the school.
- Superintendent should direct parent that registration is not complete until a religion course has been selected.

If parent is not willing to comply, the parent should be directed to seek educational opportunity elsewhere. Superintendent may direct parent to the director's office. Superintendent will send letter to parent indicating content of meeting and outlining expectations of attendance in a Catholic secondary school.



Religious Studies Exemption Meeting Guide for Director

- Director will confirm with parent that he or she has met with vice-principal, principal, and superintendent.
- Director will question parent on the choice of selecting a Catholic school without enrolment in religion courses and/or faith life of the school.
- Director will determine if religious exemption will be granted.



Sample Letter for Religious Studies Exemption for Principals

- DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR EXEMPTION

Date

Name
Address
City, ON PC

Dear

I have reviewed your written request to exempt insert name of student from taking part in Religious Studies Courses at insert name of school. Catholic education is rooted in the belief that the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board offers an educational program that is distinct, relative to our public system counterparts, in its emphasis on Catholic faith formation, evangelization, and religious education. Religious Studies programs at insert name of school form an integral part of the faith formation and academic education of our students. In addition to the courses offered at insert name of school, the school offers a wide array of programs (especially through Campus Ministry) that are intended to provide faith filled opportunities for students to develop their God given potential in all area.

All students registered in Catholic secondary schools are required to take one Religious Studies Course in each of their first four years of secondary school. All teachers in a Catholic secondary school shall incorporate the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations into every course that is being taught. Only students who have successfully completed one Religious Studies Course in each of Grades 9 through 12 shall be eligible to receive a Catholic Secondary School Diploma and awards of merit at graduation ceremonies.

Subsection 42(11-13) of the Education Act provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “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.” Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision.

I understand that your [son/daughter] is a Catholic student who attended [Name of Catholic elementary school]. I also understand your [son/daughter] does not qualify to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board. In light of the above, your [son/daughter] does not qualify for the exemption under subsection 42(11-13) of the Education Act.

In the event that you choose to continue with your request, I respectfully ask that you provide a rationale in writing, for the request so that we may adapt our programming to better meet the needs of your child/student.

Should you have any concerns about this matter, or any other matter, please feel free to call me at insert name of school.

Sincerely,

School Principal
School

c: Superintendent of Education
Director of Education



Sample Letter for Religious Studies Exemption for Principals

DOES QUALIFY FOR EXEMPTION – REFER FORWARD

Date

Name
Address
City, ON PC

Dear

I have reviewed your written request to exempt *insert name of student* from taking part in Religious Studies Courses at *insert name of school*. Catholic education is rooted in the belief that the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board offers an educational program that is distinct, relative to our public system counterparts, in its emphasis on Catholic faith formation, evangelization, and religious education. Religious Studies programs at *insert name of school* form an integral part of the faith formation and academic education of our students. In addition to the courses offered at *insert name of school*, the school offers a wide array of programs (especially through Campus Ministry) that are intended to provide faith filled opportunities for students to develop their God given potential in all areas.

All students registered in Catholic secondary schools are required to take one Religious Studies Course in each of their first four years of secondary school. All teachers in a Catholic secondary school shall incorporate the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations into every course that is being taught. Only students who have successfully completed one Religious Studies Course in each of Grades 9 through 12 shall be eligible to receive a Catholic Secondary School Diploma and awards of merit at graduation ceremonies.

Subsection 42(11-13) of the Education Act provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “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.” Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. For the reasons given above, your [son/daughter] qualifies to be considered for the exemption under the provisions of the Education Act.

We confirm that the historical mandate of the Catholic school system in Ontario is to model the entire syllabus of the school on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Throughout the province, Catholic school boards have been using the Ontario School Graduate Expectations as a foundation reflective of the vision of all learners, our rootedness in a distinctive Christian anthropology and view of the world, and a renewed sense of the distinctiveness and purpose that is publicly funded Catholic education. For this reason, we ask that you reconsider your request for this exemption. We hope your (son/daughter) will continue to embrace the unique opportunity to fully participate in the Catholic education program at (name school) that includes religious studies.

In the event that you choose to continue with your request, I respectfully ask that you confirm your decision with the school in writing so that that we may adapt our programming to better meet the needs of your child/student.

Should you have any concerns about this matter, or any other matter, please feel free to call me at *insert name of school*.

Sincerely,

School Principal
School

c: Superintendent of Education
Director of Education