



FAITH CLUB AND PRAYER ACTIVITIES

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Policy Statement: It is the policy of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board to support the values, beliefs and cultures within Hamilton-Wentworth by accommodating Faith Club and Prayer Activity in its schools.

RESPONSIBILITY: Supervisory Officer responsible for Equity.

1.0 OVERALL PROCEDURES FOR FAITH-BASED ACTIVITIES:

- 1.1 All faith-based activities will respect and comply with the Education Act, Ministry of Education and Training Regulations and supporting Program Memorandums and Board policies/practices.
- 1.2 The Board, through the InterFaith Advisory Committee, will monitor activities.
- 1.3 All faith-based activities will have a Teacher-Advisor.
- 1.4 Role of Teacher-Advisor will be to:
 - act as a facilitator
 - monitor faith activity according to HWDSB Faith Club and Prayer Activities Policy
 - monitor appropriate student 'behaviour'
 - communicate the positive goals of the activity: which increase awareness, appreciation and valuing diversity
 - Principals will make every effort to facilitate the formation of, and provide space for, the faith activity.
- 1.5 Volunteers involved in faith-based activities must comply with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Volunteer Policy, i.e., Hamilton Police Service Vulnerable Sector Screening, commonly referred to as a Police Check. The Board will ensure the volunteer/leader is authorized to participate in the activity by their faith supervisory body.
- 1.6 Faith-based activities are open to students of all faiths.
- 1.7 Local faith groups participating in faith-based activities:
 - are defined as recognized religious groups registered with the Ontario Registry General,
 - have charity status,
 - the legal right to solemnize marriage, and
 - have articles of incorporation.
- 1.8 Aboriginal/Native cultural activity is recognized and included in this policy.

2.0 COMPLAINT PROCESS:

- 2.1 A complaint will precipitate a review of the activity by the principal.
- 2.2 A complaint will be facilitated by the Supervisory Officer responsible for "Equity".
- 2.3 The InterFaith Advisory Committee will review a complaint and a ruling may result in the Faith Club losing its right to meet in school if the activity does not meet the policies of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

3.0 FAITH CLUB ACTIVITY

3.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

The activity:

- must not be indoctrination.
- must not give primacy to any particular religious faith.
- must be open and accessible to all students on an equal basis.
- is for groups of students who gather voluntarily with a common interest.
- is a time of encouragement, pro-social activity.
- is a time for instruction, understanding and tolerance in terms of personal faith and the faiths held by others.
- provides a safe place for students to speak freely.
- develops an awareness of other faiths and beliefs.

3.2 OPERATING PROCEDURES:

- Students, if they are under 18, must have parental permission to participate. Students can attend a maximum of two meetings to explore the activity, but require parental permission to continue attending.
- Agendas must be student driven and outline how the leader will facilitate the group and ensure multi-faith focus.
- Agendas for each year must be forwarded to the InterFaith Advisory Committee (IFAC) who will ensure the activity is in compliance with the Education Act, Ministry of Education and Training Regulations and Board Policy for Faith Club and Prayer Activity.
- Club agendas must demonstrate exposure to multi-faith activity. This translates to at least two denominations and at least one other major faith group activity. Faith representatives do not necessarily have to be present at each meeting, but the club agenda must demonstrate a multi-faith focus.
 - Definition of multi-faith activity: Major faith groups such as Christians, Muslims, Hindu, etc., have sub-groups or denominations. Multi-faith representation equals a minimum of two denominations plus one other faith group, or three different major faith groups.

3.3 ACTIVITIES FOR FAITH CLUBS MUST BE THE RESULT OF A STUDENT-DRIVEN AGENDA AND MAY INCLUDE:

- pro-social activity supporting community
- pro-social activity for student celebration in one or more religious tenets
- full group activity with speakers
- activity driven by student questions
- sponsoring activities for students at risk
- expositions of various faith festivals

3.4 THE ROLE OF FAITH CLUBS IS TO:

- build character
- study versus practice
- expose versus impose
- instruct versus indoctrinate
- educate versus convert
- be academic versus devotional
- study versus teach
- raise awareness versus acceptance
- inform versus conform

3.5 STRUCTURES FOR FAITH CLUB ACTIVITY:

- May be acted out in a variety of structures, i.e., in full group activity/small group activity.
- All Faith Club activity will be considered part of a system network of faith club activity.
- Faith Clubs may exist that have a two-denominational focus. Examples of these clubs are:
 - Faith Club / Christian Perspective;
 - Faith Club / Muslim Perspective;
 - Faith Club / Hindu Perspective, etc.
- Each Faith Club must engage in one other denominational activity at least once per semester.
- Each Faith Club must engage in one other major faith group activity at least once per semester.

4.0 PRAYER ACTIVITY

4.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- The school community should encourage, not discourage, the connection of students to their spiritual beliefs
- This is an optional and voluntary activity.
- Sharing time may take place proceeding corporate / individual prayer.
- Prayer may be meditation, sitting in silence, listening to request, holding hands/raising of hands, kneeling, chanting, singing and music.
- Content of activity must be positive for society, i.e., constructive, just and generous.
- Prayer activity is a gathering of people to interact with each other and with God or guiding Spirit.

4.2 OPERATING PROCEDURES:

- A time-allotted area will be provided for this activity.
- Leaders of this activity will be accountable to the School Principal.
- Group or individuals requesting permission for prayer/reflection activity must outline their objectives.
- A leader must be an accredited person with a completed Hamilton Police Service Vulnerable Sector Screening, commonly referred to as a Police Check, according to the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Volunteer Policy.
- If this activity is led by a volunteer, this person must be approved by an accredited faith group according to the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Policy on Faith Club and Prayer Activity.