

March 24, 2022

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Re: Review of Holiday Distribution and Religious and Holy Days

Dear Minister Lecce,

This letter is to inform you of a motion approved by the Trustees of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) at our Board meeting on February 28, 2022. This motion relates to the distribution of school holidays to support religious and holy days and seeks to ensure inclusive school environments for all students.

As you know, the following dates that are identified as school holidays are listed under section 2(4) of [R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 304](#) of the Education Act. The current distribution of school holidays follows the statutory holidays of the province of Ontario, which largely reflect the Christian calendar and other western traditions. Religious and holy days from other cultures and faiths are not considered in the school holiday calendar, creating a barrier for many of our students.

We have heard from our students about the challenges they face due when choosing to celebrate an important holy day not currently recognized in the school year calendar. Though a religious and creed-based accommodation procedure is in place at HWDSB, students have indicated that an approved accommodation still maintains a school workload that students are required to make up upon their return to class.

The choice of hindering one's education by choosing to exercise the right to celebrate a religious holiday puts undue stress on our students. Recognizing important holy days of faiths beyond Christianity could not only alleviate the stress experienced by students, but also create a greater sense of belonging within the school community.

We call on the Ministry of Education to review identified school holidays under Section 3(4) of R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 304. This review is an opportunity to update the school year calendar in a manner is inclusive to people of all religions and faiths. Canada's diversity is one of its many strengths. By taking into consideration the religious and holy days beyond the Christian calendar that is currently supported, schools can ensure a more inclusive environment for students and staff of all faiths and improve the experiences of students in public education.

The Trustees of HWDSB appreciate your attention to review the school holidays to ensure an inclusive school environment for students of all faiths. We thank you for your time and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Dawn Danko
Chair, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board