



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

Box 2064, Suite 1804
20 Eglinton Avenue West
Toronto, Ontario M4R 1K8
T. 416.932.9460 F. 416.932.9459
ocsta@ocsta.on.ca www.ocsta.on.ca

Patrick Daly, *President*
Beverley Eckensweiler, *Vice President*
Nick Milanetti, *Executive Director*

June 14, 2017

TO: Chairpersons and Directors of Education
- All Catholic District School Boards

FROM: Patrick J. Daly, President

SUBJECT: Religious Education Exemption Issue in the Media

Recent articles in the media have perpetuated the misperception about the requirement to take religious education courses in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools.

Section 42(13) of the *Education Act* sets out the relevant exemption for programs or courses of study in religious education. This section applies to students who attend Catholic schools but whose parents are public school supporters. The intent of Section 42(13) is to accommodate the students of non-Catholic families who choose Catholic high schools for their education.

This exemption **does not in any way change Catholic District School Boards' rights** to require Catholic students to take religious education courses in each of their 4 years of secondary school.

For your reference, attached are key messages to assist you in answering questions from the media and the community

Attachment

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Key Messaging Regarding Religious Course Exemptions

- Approximately 2.3 million Catholic ratepayers in Ontario expect a Catholic learning environment in Catholic schools. Catholic school boards have the mandate of fulfilling that goal.
- Of the approximately 189,842 students in Ontario's Catholic secondary schools, OCSTA is aware of less than a dozen requests for exemption from religious education courses. Ontario families who are choosing Catholic high schools do so because they appreciate and want the spiritual focus in our learning environments.
- Section 42(13) of the Education Act was written to accommodate the students of non-Catholic families who choose Catholic high schools for their education. The section sets out the relevant exemption for programs or courses of study in religious education and applies to students who attend Catholic schools but whose parents are public school supporters.
- On rare occasions when Catholic parents make the request for such exemptions, Catholic school boards make decisions within the context of the *Education Act* which mandates Catholic schools to provide Catholic education for ratepayers who choose Catholic schools for their children.
- Religious education courses are part of the core curriculum in Catholic schools. These credit courses teach not only an inclusive world-view perspective on the major world religions, they reinforce the social justice teachings that are part of the foundation of a Catholic education.
- To provide an authentic, engaging and Christ-centred learning experience for students in religious education courses, Catholic schools depend on the enrollment and participation of Catholic students.
- Catholic school boards make decisions to fulfill the expectations of Ontarians who choose Catholic schools because they expect a Catholic learning environment that will nurture the holistic developmental needs of students – mind, body and spirit.
- Catholic school boards look at each request for exemption on a case by case basis, adhering to the requirements of legislation and taking into consideration the needs and priorities parents and students.

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