Celebrations, Commemorations, and Flags — Celebrations Procedures 323-A

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1. General

These procedures outline the steps and considerations for planning and implementing celebrations and days of significance within the board. It ensures all events are inclusive, respectful, and aligned with the board's commitment to equity and the Ontario Human Rights Code. These procedures also provide guidance to support meaningful, substantive practices that may be connected to curriculum where appropriate, while avoiding tokenism or practices that may marginalize members of the school community.

2. General Principles for Celebrations and Observances

All school and board-site celebrations, events, and recognitions must:

- Be inclusive and aligned with the board's commitment to fostering a welcoming and equitable environment for all students and staff, regardless of their diverse identities and beliefs.
- Be substantive and meaningful, avoiding actions that could be perceived as tokenistic or marginalizing.
- Actively engage diverse student, parent/guardian/caregiver, and community voices in the planning process to ensure a wide representation of experiences and perspectives.
- Promote and build understanding and respect for diverse beliefs, especially for religious and creed celebrations.
- Reflect a broad range of accomplishments and participation, ensuring inclusivity and representation of diverse student experiences.
- Be explicitly connected to the curriculum where possible.

3. Planning and Review

Under the leadership of the principal, school staff shall establish a collaborative approach to planning all celebrations and days of significance.

3.1 Collaborative Consultation

Consult with students, parents/guardians/caregivers, and school councils during the planning stage to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences are considered.

3.2 Critical Reflection

Prior to implementing any celebration or activity, critically reflect on how the event may impact or marginalize members of the school community who may not participate due to cultural beliefs, faith, socioeconomic status, or other personal reasons.

4. Guidelines for Celebration, Spirit Days and Seasonal Observances

These guidelines apply to all celebrations and activities, including but not limited to Halloween, Valentine's Day, Easter, spirit dress-up days, and other cultural, religious, or seasonal observances.

4.1 Curriculum and Learning

4.1.1 Schools shall continue to prioritize meaningful, curriculum-based learning throughout the school day.

4.1.2 Time devoted to celebration-specific or spirit activities should be limited and purposefully planned.

4.2 Participation and Access

4.2.1 Schools shall acknowledge that not all students and families observe or participate in the same celebrations or traditions.

4.2.2 Participation in celebrations and spirit activities must be optional and free from pressure or expectation.

4.2.3 Students who choose not to participate must not be segregated, singled out, or excluded from regular school activities, and shall be provided with equally valued alternatives.

4.3 Equity and Socioeconomic Considerations

4.3.1 Activities that may privilege socioeconomic status (e.g., competitions, mandatory purchases, elaborate costumes or gifts) shall be avoided.

4.3.2 Efforts should be made to minimize or eliminate costs associated with participation.

4.3.3 Celebrations should be designed to ensure broad and equitable access for all students.

4.4 Attire, Symbols, and Materials

4.4.1 Expectations for attire or materials shall be clearly communicated in advance.

4.4.2 Attire, symbols, or representations that stereotype, trivialize, or misappropriate culture, race, ethnicity, religion, or identity are prohibited.

4.4.3 The use of items that could pose safety risks (e.g., replica weapons, unsafe accessories) is prohibited.

4.4.4 Health and safety considerations, including hygiene practices, must be observed.

4.5 Respectful Practice and School Climate

4.5.1 Celebrations and activities shall be planned and implemented in ways that affirm dignity, belonging, and respect.

4.5.2 Schools shall avoid practices that centre one tradition or belief system to the exclusion of others.

4.5.3 Individual students or families must not be identified or blamed for decisions to modify or limit celebrations.

5. Graduation Protocol

These procedures are grounded in a commitment to inclusive, student-centered celebrations. Events should be designed to elevate student and family engagement, with intentional attention to voices from communities that have

been historically underserved or marginalized. Planning decisions must prioritize student and community perspectives, ensuring that a wide range of student accomplishments and contributions are recognized and honored.

5.1 Scheduling of Commencements, Elementary Graduation, and End-of-Year Celebrations

5.1.1 Secondary school commencements will be held in June unless there is a clear mandate gathered from student and community voice to hold it at a different time of year. Such exceptions shall require approval of the Superintendent of Student Acheivement and the Director of Education. The local trustee will also be consulted on the matter.

5.1.2 A “window” of appropriate dates in June will be available in a document maintained on SharePoint (updated by January each year) so schools can schedule their commencements for the years specified.

5.1.3 Schools should collaborate with other schools in their area so that commencements and grade 8 and 6 graduations do not occur on the same day. If there are potential conflicts, elementary schools should defer to secondary schools in the scheduling of these events.

5.1.4 Wherever possible, opportunities for students and families to participate in events in late afternoon and evening should be provided to accommodate different schedules.

5.2 Format of Events

5.2.1 The use of “flights or “cohorts” of graduates is strongly recommended for secondary school commencements to reduce ceremony length and increase student and family engagement.

5.2.2 Student and community voice must be incorporated in the planning of events. Specifically, students and community should be consulted regarding the overall format of commencements and graduations every three years in partnership with School Council and Student Councils (where appropriate). Every effort should be made to include a wide variety of diverse student and community voices and experiences in this process.

5.2.3 During academic award distribution, students should cross the stage or be called upon no more than twice during the ceremony. Also, there should be equitable distribution of awards so that a wide range of students are recognized for their achievements and efforts.

5.3 Other Considerations

5.3.1 It is recommended that schools conduct a review of awards and scholarships to ensure alignment with Policy 504 Equitable and Inclusive Education.

5.3.2 Efforts should be made to keep costs associated with such events minimal so that barriers of financial access for students and families are eliminated.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Principal

The principal is responsible for leading a collaborative and inclusive approach to planning and recognizing all celebrations and days of significance, and ensuring all activities align with the principles in section 2 and adhere to this procedure.

6.2 School Staff

School staff are responsible for consulting with students, families, and staff, reflecting on their practices, and implementing activities in a way that aligns with the principles of equity and inclusion outlined in this procedure.

6.3 Students, Parents/Guardians/Caregivers, and School Councils

Students, parents/guardians/caregivers, and school councils shall be consulted in the planning and organization of school-wide celebrations and events.