Toronto District School Board	OPERAT	OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE	
DATE:	September 2000	PR.544 SCH: Opening and Closing Exercises	
REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:			
TDSB PR.546 SCH: Religious Holy Days			

Purpose: To provide information about opening and closing exercises in schools

The *Education Act* has been amended by Bill 81 to add Section 304 which states:

- (2) Same--The opening or closing exercises **must include the singing of "O Canada"** and may include the recitation of a pledge of citizenship in the form set out in the regulations.
- (3) Exceptions—a pupil is not required to participate in the opening or closing exercises in such circumstances as are prescribed by regulation.

Note: Regulation 298 has previously been amended. Those amendments are listed in the Table of Regulations in the Statutes of Ontario, 1998.

- 1. Section 4 of Regulation 298 of the Revised Regulations of Ontario,1990 is revoked and the following substituted:
- 4. (1) This section applies with respect to opening and closing exercises in public elementary schools and in public secondary schools.
- (2) The opening or closing exercises may include the singing of God Save the Queen and may also include the following types of readings that impart social, moral or spiritual values and that are representative of Ontario's multicultural society:
 - 1. Scriptural writings including prayers.
 - 2. Secular writings.
- (3) The opening or closing exercises may include a period of silence.
- (4) In the following circumstances, a pupil is not required to participate in the opening or closing exercises described in this section:
 - 1. In the case of a pupil who is less than 18 years old, if the pupil's parent or guardian applies to the principal of the school for an exemption from the exercises.

Questions and Answers

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- Q1: Will students be able to refuse to participate in reciting the pledge or the singing of "O Canada?"
- A: There are currently exemptions in relation to opening and closing exercises in schools. A similar exemption will still apply so that the singing of "O Canada" or reciting a pledge of citizenship do not conflict with religious or cultural freedoms.
- Q2: In earlier announcements, the Ministry has referred to the optional recitation of a pledge of citizenship. Why are you now requiring that this pledge be the Canadian Oath of Citizenship and no other pledge? Wasn't there supposed to be some flexibility in the pledge to be recited?
- A: The flexibility was around the mandatory aspect of reciting a pledge of citizenship. At this time this is the only option covered under the *Safe Schools Act*. However, schools still have flexibility to include other elements in their opening or closing exercises, as many do (e.g., readings from various religions).
- Q3: What is the Canadian Oath of Citizenship?
- A: I affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen.
- Q4: How will a school decide if they will require recitation of the pledge?
- A: School councils must be consulted to determine whether opening or closing exercises at their school will include a pledge of citizenship. The principal must also ensure that the decision is consistent with any Board policies that might be established regarding opening and closing exercises. In addition, the principal must review the decision with the school council about reciting a pledge annually at the beginning of the school year.