



EXEMPTION FROM INSTRUCTION RELATED TO THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SEXUAL HEALTH EXPECTATIONS

Responsibility:	Superintendents, Student Achievement & Well-Being, Teaching and Learning and Equity Divisions
Legal References:	PPM 162
Related References:	Equity and Inclusion Policy 1008 Faith and Religious Accommodations Policy 1012 Faith and Religious Accommodations Administrative Procedure 1230 Exemption Form IS-20-HPE Exemption Form IS-22-HPE (Remote Learning) Ontario Human Rights Code 1962, 2013
Effective:	February 2020
Revisions:	March 2020, November 2020, March 2022, June 2025
Reviewed:	June 2025

1. Preamble

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) affirms the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Statement in relation to [The Ontario Curriculum for Health and Physical Education, Grades 1 to 8](#). *It states that all students deserve to see themselves and their families reflected in the Ontario Curriculum, and should receive information to protect their health and well-being.*

In response to the Ontario Ministry of Education's [Policy/Program Memorandum \(PPM\) No. 162](#), WRDSB will exempt students, at the request of their parent(s)/caregiver(s), from instruction related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations found in strand D of the Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education, Grades 1-8, 2019.

2. Belief Statements

2.1 All students can achieve a high standard, all staff can teach and support students to a high standard, and high expectations and early intervention are essential.

2.2 All students should receive timely access to information to protect their health and well-being, break down stigma, and experience inclusive learning environments.

2.3 The WRDSB is committed to providing a school environment with the highest quality of education to prepare students for successful futures as global citizens. WRDSB ensures that the uniqueness and diversity of its students, staff and community are deeply embedded in its services and programs. Equity, inclusiveness, and diversity are goals in all programs, practices, and facilities.

2.4 WRDSB acknowledges the importance of a child's understanding of human development and sexual health and that students are best served when our staff, families, and caregivers work in partnership to support students' learning about healthy living.

3. Conditions

3.1 Students can be exempted from instruction on an individual basis, according to the following conditions:

3.1.1 Exemptions are limited to explicit instruction related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations found in strand D of The Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education, Grades 1–8, 2019. Students will not be exempted from instruction related to any other expectations in this curriculum or related to expectations in other curriculum subjects.

3.1.2 Exemptions will be granted only for instruction related to **all** the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations in a student's grade, and not for instruction related to selected expectations or groups of expectations. Exemptions may be granted for the entire strand, but will not be granted for specific expectations or topics within the strand.

3.1.3 References to human development and sexual health made by teachers, board staff, or students outside the intentional teaching of content related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations are not included in the exemption procedure.

3.1.4 There will be no academic penalty for an exemption.

3.1.5 There will be no assessment, evaluation, or reporting of exempted students' achievement of Human Development and Sexual Health expectations in their particular grade. Exempted students' grade in health and physical education will be determined on the basis of the overall expectations in strand D of the curriculum, without consideration of the specific expectations under Human Development and Sexual Health.

4. Notice and Communications

4.1 **Role of the Principal** (see [Appendix A for Principal Checklist](#))

4.1.1 Principals will collect from each teacher who teaches Health and Physical Education, the dates when they intend to teach the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations found in Strand D of the Curriculum.

4.1.2 The principal will provide parents/caregivers, each school year, with a letter that lists the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations for the grade ([download letters by grade in Appendix B](#)); at least twenty school days before the start of the "period of instruction" related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations. The "period of instruction" refers to the period, including the beginning and end dates, during which instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health during health and physical education classes is delivered. This period could extend over several days or weeks, depending on individual school calendars and teacher lesson plans.

4.1.3 In the case of a combined grade classroom, the principal will provide parents/caregivers with the notification letter regarding the period of instruction that corresponds with their actual grade level. In addition, students should only receive instruction in the Human Development and Sexual Health component of Strand D related to the expectations in their grade. Students may remain in the classroom doing alternative work while students in the other grade are receiving instruction. It is not an expectation that families are informed in advance of the expectations being addressed in both grades.

4.1.4 In the letter issued to parents/caregivers in 4.1.2, the principal will inform parents/caregivers that they can choose to have their child or children exempted from instruction related to Human Development and Sexual Health expectations by completing and returning an exemption form ([IS-20-HPE/IS-22-HPE \(RL\)](#)) for each child. Students who are exempted will be exempted from **all** of the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations and are not to choose specific expectations or topics for exemption.

4.1.5 Principals will make the standard exemption form available to parents/caregivers every school year ([IS-20-HPE/IS-22-HPE \(RL\)](#)).

4.1.6 Principals will inform parents/caregivers of the date by which the completed exemption form or written request must be submitted in order for their child to be exempted from instruction related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations. The deadline for parents/caregivers to submit their completed exemption form to the principal must be no later than five (5) school days before the start of the period of instruction.

4.1.7 Principals will make clear that, in the case of an unforeseen event, school boards and schools have the authority to move the period of instruction to a later date in the school year and must give notice of the change to parent(s)/caregiver(s) as soon as reasonably possible. An “unforeseen event” refers to an event that impairs a school’s ability to administer the “period of instruction”.

4.1.8 Principals are required to allow students to be exempt from instruction related to the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations without academic penalty when a request form for an exemption has been submitted from a parent/caregiver in accordance with this procedure.

4.1.9 Principals will contact parents/caregivers to acknowledge the receipt of exemption forms from parents/caregivers, including a meeting between parents/caregivers and administration to explain the reason for the request. During this meeting, an opportunity to discuss where the child will be during the exemption period, will occur. ([Appendix C](#))

4.1.10 Principals will make the final decision about whether to accept or reject a request for an exemption that does not fall within the parameters set out in this procedure.

(i) The Exemption Form is not returned prior to the notice period of five (5) school days before the start of the period of instruction;

(ii) The Exemption Form is incomplete (e.g., no signature) or is not on the standard form;

(iii) The Exemption Form is returned to the school after the period of instruction has begun.

4.1.11 Principals will complete the [tracking form for exemption requests](#) (approved and not approved) by grade level to report to Learning Support Services.

4.2 Role of the Teacher

4.2.1 Teachers will inform the principal at the beginning of the school year when they intend to teach the Human Development and Sexual Health expectations found in Strand D of the Curriculum. The “period of instruction” refers to the period, including the beginning and end dates, during which instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health during health and physical education classes is delivered. This period could extend over several days or weeks, depending on individual schools’ calendars and teachers’ lesson plans.

4.2.2 In the case of a combined grade classroom, students’ families will receive the notification letter regarding the period of instruction that corresponds with their actual grade level. In addition, students should only receive instruction in the Human Development and Sexual Health component of Strand D related to the expectations in their grade. Students may remain in the classroom doing alternative work while students in the other grade are receiving instruction. It is not an expectation that families are informed in advance of the expectations being addressed in both grades.

4.3 Role of Parents/Caregivers

4.3.1 Each year and for every child, parents/caregivers will notify the principal of their request for exemption using the standard hardcopy Exemption Form ([IS-20-HPE/IS-22-HPE \(RL\)](#)).

4.3.2 Parents/Caregivers will be required to submit their completed Exemption Form to the principal no later than five (5) school days before the start of the period of instruction.

4.3.3 Parents/Caregivers must submit their request using the Exemption Form ([IS-20-HPE/IS-22-HPE \(RL\)](#)). Verbal requests for exemptions will not be accepted.

5. Supervision of Exempted Students

5.1 Because school boards are responsible for student safety and well-being during instructional time, options for supervision must be offered. The parents/caregivers will be given the choice of how their exempted child will be supervised during the exemption period. Parents/Caregivers must choose one of the following options for their child:

5.1.1 To remain in the classroom during the exemption period without taking part in instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health, and to be assigned work or activities by the teacher that are unrelated to Human Development and Sexual Health; or

5.1.2 To be released into the care of the parent/caregiver or the parent's/caregiver's approved designate.



AP 1238: Exemptions from Instruction ated to Human Development and Sexual Health

Principal Checklist

- ☐ Establish and communicate a date for teachers to submit their dates of instruction on the Human Development and Sexual Health section (found in Strand D) of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.
- ☐ Parents/Caregivers must be informed that they can choose to have their child exempted from instruction related to Human Development and Sexual Health expectations. An electronic or hard-copy grade appropriate letter (links below) along with the exemption form ([IS-20-HPE for in-person students](#) & [IS-22-HPE for remote learning students](#)) must be sent to parents/caregivers, a minimum of 20 days prior to instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health, informing them of the selected dates.

[Grade 1 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 2 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 3 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 4 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 5 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 6 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 7 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)
[Grade 8 Principal Letter re: Notice of Period of Instruction](#)

(In the case of a combined grade classroom, please refer to AP1238 4.1.3)

- ☐ Acknowledge receipt of parent/caregiver requests for exemption and schedule a meeting with parent(s)/caregiver(s) to discuss the request using the template letter ([Appendix C](#)) in email form or hardcopy.
- ☐ Meet with parent/caregiver. See [Appendix D](#), Supporting Conversations with Families.
- ☐ Make final decision about whether to accept or reject a request.
- ☐ Confirm with the parents/caregivers on decision and a plan of action during the parent meeting.
- ☐ Make plans for supervision of exempted students considering the total number of exempted students, accommodation and operational feasibility. Consult with FOS Superintendent as needed.
- ☐ Complete the [Exemption Request Tracking Form](#) for approved and not approved exemption requests.

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

This letter will tell you what your child will be learning in Human Development and Sexual Health. This is part of the Healthy Living section of the 2019 Ontario Curriculum for Health and Physical Education for Grades 1 to 8.

All students should see themselves and their families reflected in Ontario's curriculum. Students should get the information they need to protect their health and well-being. We want all students to feel respected and safe in our classrooms.

The lessons for Human Development and Sexual Health are made for your child's age. The lessons will provide students with real information. The lessons will help them to be responsible for their own health. The lessons will help them to be part of an inclusive school culture. Students will learn to make good choices that can protect them.

Speak with your child about healthy living and the topics listed below while your child is learning about them.

Schools must tell caregivers when students will learn about Human Development and Sexual Health. This is so that caregivers can exempt their child from this learning if needed. Your child's class will learn this information on or about _____ and end on _____ for the _____ school year.

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 1 will:

- identify body parts, including genitalia (e.g., penis, testicles, vagina, vulva), using correct terminology and body-positive language
- identify the five senses and describe how each functions
- demonstrate an understanding of and apply proper hygienic procedures for protecting their own health and preventing the transmission of disease to others

The Ministry of Education has more information on their website at:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/health.html>.

An exemption does not include topics discussed outside of the health curriculum. WRDSB follows the Ontario Human Rights Code. We welcome all students and their caregivers. We respect differences. We are recognizing and removing bias in our schools.

Please ask your child's teacher or principal if you have any questions before deciding to exempt your child.

Complete the **Exemption Form** (attached) if you do not want your child learning all the expectations listed in this letter. Bring the form to the school at least five days before lessons in Human Development and Sexual Health begin in your child's classroom. The principal will call you to talk about the exemption. The school will provide an interpreter if needed.

Sincerely,

Principal, _____

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 2 will:

- outline the basic stages of human development (e.g., infant, child, adolescent, adult, older adult) and related changes, and identify physical, mental, social, and environmental factors that are important for healthy growth and living throughout life
- demonstrate the ability to identify and appreciate aspects of how their bodies work and describe what they can do to ensure that they will continue to appreciate their bodies as they grow and change
- demonstrate an understanding of and apply practices that contribute to the maintenance of good oral health

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 3 will:

- identify the characteristics of healthy relationships (e.g., accepting and respecting differences, avoiding assumptions, being inclusive, communicating openly, establishing and respecting personal boundaries, listening, showing mutual respect and caring, being honest) and describe ways of responding to bullying and other challenges (e.g., exclusion, discrimination, peer pressure, abuse) and of communicating consent in their interactions with others
- identify factors (e.g., sleep, food, physical activity, heredity, environment, support from a caring adult, sense of belonging, peer influence) that affect physical development (e.g., of hair, skin, teeth, body size and shape), social-emotional development (e.g., of self-awareness, adaptive skills, social skills), and the development of a healthy body image (e.g., of the ability to enjoy, respect, and celebrate one's body, to acknowledge one's thoughts and feelings about it, to accept its shape and size and to focus instead on what it can do)
- describe how visible differences (e.g., skin, hair, and eye colour; facial features; body size and shape; physical aids or different physical abilities; clothing; possessions) and invisible differences (e.g., learning abilities, skills and talents, personal or cultural values and beliefs, mental illness, family background, personal preferences, allergies and sensitivities) make each person unique, and identify ways of showing respect for differences in others

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 4 will:

- describe the physical changes that occur at puberty (e.g., growth of body hair, breast development, changes in voice and body size, production of body odour, skin changes) and the emotional and social impacts that may result from these changes
- demonstrate an understanding of personal care needs and the application of personal hygienic practices associated with the onset of puberty (e.g., increased importance of regular bathing/showering and regular clothing changes; use of hygiene products; continuing importance of regular hygiene practices, including hand washing, oral health care and care of prosthetic devices and residual limbs)

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 5 will:

- identify the parts of the reproductive system, and describe how the body changes during puberty
- describe the processes of menstruation and spermatogenesis, and explain how these processes relate to reproduction and overall development

- identify intersecting factors that affect the development of a person's self-concept, including their sexual orientation (e.g., self-awareness, self-acceptance, social environment, opinions of others who are important to them, influence of stereotypical thinking, awareness of their own strengths and needs, social competency, cultural identity, availability of support, body image, mental health and emotional well-being, physical abilities), and how these factors can support their personal health and well-being
- describe emotional and interpersonal stresses related to puberty (e.g., questions about changing bodies and feelings, adjusting to changing relationships, crushes and more intense feelings, conflicts between personal desires and cultural teachings and practices), recognize signs that could indicate mental health concerns, and identify strategies that they can apply to manage stress, build resilience, keep open communication with family members and caring adults, and enhance their mental health and emotional well-being (e.g., being active, writing feelings in a journal, accessing information about their concerns, taking action on a concern, talking to a trusted peer or adult, breathing deeply, meditating, seeking cultural advice from Elders, Métis Senators, knowledge keepers or knowledge holders)

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 6 will:

- demonstrate an understanding of the impacts of viewing sexually explicit media, including pornography (e.g., leads to a limited or distorted understanding of relationships; reinforces harmful gender norms; promotes an unrealistic or idealized body image)
- describe how they can build confidence and lay a foundation for healthy relationships by acquiring a clearer understanding of the physical, social, and emotional changes that occur during adolescence (e.g., physical: voice changes, skin changes, body growth; social: changing social relationships, increasing influence of peers; emotional: increased intensity of feelings, new interest in relationships, confusion and questions about changes)
- assess the effects of stereotypes and assumptions regarding gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, mental health, and abilities on an individual's self-concept, social inclusion, and relationships with others, and propose appropriate ways of responding to and changing harmful assumptions and stereotypes that can lead to destructive social attitudes including homophobia and racism

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 7 will:

- explain the importance of having a shared understanding with a partner about the following: delaying sexual activity until they are older (e.g., choosing to abstain from any genital contact; choosing to abstain from vaginal or anal intercourse; choosing to abstain from oral-genital contact); the reasons for not engaging in sexual activity; the concept of consent, the legal age of consent, and how consent is communicated; and, in general, the need to communicate clearly with each other when making decisions about sexual activity in a healthy, loving relationship
- identify sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs), and describe their symptoms
- identify ways of preventing STBBIs and/or unplanned pregnancy, such as delaying first intercourse and other sexual activities until a person is older and using condoms and other forms of protection consistently
- demonstrate an understanding of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive factors that need to be considered when making decisions related to sexual health (e.g., sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections [STBBIs], possible side effects of contraceptives, pregnancy, protective value of

vaccinations, social labelling, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, self-concept issues, relationships, love, respect, desire, pleasure, cultural teachings)

- explain how relationships with others (e.g., family, peers) and sexual health may be affected by the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty (e.g., effect of physical maturation and emotional changes on family relationships; effect of growing interest in intimate relationships on peer relationships; increased risk of STBBIs and/or pregnancy with onset of sexual activity)

The Ministry of Education's Expectations for Human Development and Sexual Health

Children in Grade 8 will:

- identify and explain factors that can affect an individual's decisions about sexual activity (e.g., previous thinking about reasons to wait, including making a choice to delay sexual activity and establishing personal limits; perceived personal readiness; peer pressure; desire; curiosity; self-concept; awareness and acceptance of gender identity and sexual orientation; physical or cognitive disabilities and possible associated assumptions; legal concerns such as the legal age of consent; awareness of the risk of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections [STBBIs]; concerns about the risk of becoming a parent; use of alcohol or drugs; personal or family values; religious beliefs; cultural teachings; access to information; media messages), and identify sources of support regarding sexual health (e.g., a health professional [doctor, nurse, public health practitioner], a teacher, a guidance counsellor, a religious leader, a parent or other trusted adult, a reputable website)
- demonstrate an understanding of gender identity (e.g., male, female, Two-Spirit, transgender), gender expression, and sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual), and identify factors that can help individuals of all identities and orientations develop a positive self-concept
- demonstrate an understanding of abstinence, contraception and the use of effective and suitable protection to prevent pregnancy and STBBIs, and the concept of consent, as well as the skills (e.g., self-awareness, communication, assertiveness, and refusal skills) they need to apply in order to make safe and healthy decisions about sexual activity (e.g., delaying first intercourse; establishing, discussing, and respecting boundaries; showing respect; opting to seek additional information and support; having safer sex)
- analyze the attractions and benefits associated with being in a healthy relationship (e.g., support, understanding, camaraderie, pleasure), as well as the benefits, risks, and drawbacks, for themselves and others, of relationships involving different degrees of sexual intimacy (e.g., hurt when relationships end or trust is broken; in more sexually intimate relationships, risk of STBBIs and related risk to future fertility, becoming a parent before you are ready, sexual harassment and exploitation; potential for dating violence)

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

This letter is to confirm that your request for an exemption from instruction related to Human Development and Sexual Health which is a component of the Healthy Living Strand of the 2019 Ontario Curriculum for Health and Physical Education for Grades **1 to 8** [*choose specific grade for student*] has been received.

The Ministry of Education requires all school boards to inform parents/caregivers when instruction related to Human Development and Sexual Health will occur in the event that parents want to exempt their child from this instruction. Your child's class will begin instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health on or about _____ and end on _____ for the _____ school year.

I would like to schedule a meeting to discuss this request further on _____ at _____. This meeting will allow you an opportunity to explain the reason for the request and discuss where your child will be supervised during the exemption period.

It is important to note that the exemption does not include topics raised outside of the health curriculum and that the Board, aligned with its commitment to equity and human rights, will continue to focus on respecting diversity, promoting inclusive education and identifying and eliminating discriminatory bias in other school programs and activities.

Kindly contact our school office at _____ and leave a voicemail message to confirm you are available to meet during the scheduled time above, or to reschedule for an alternate date and time.

Sincerely,

Principal,
_____ Public School

Supporting Conversations with Families re: AP1238

Upon receiving an exemption request from a parent/caregiver, schedule a time to meet with them. A meeting is a required part of the exemption process. The purpose of this meeting would be to review the exemption request, the reasons for the request, and the location for the supervision of the student during the period of exemption.

In preparing for the meeting, please review the following resources/information:

[WRDSB AP1238](#)

[OHRC Statement: 2019 Health and Physical Education Curriculum](#)

[HPE Specific Expectations By Grade](#)

[PPM 162](#)

[Exemption Request Tracking Form](#)

It is recommended that Administrators have the specific expectations in the Human Development and Sexual Health component of Healthy Living Strand D, of the student's grade level, readily available for the meeting with the parent(s)/caregiver(s).

The Meeting:

1. Seek clarity for why the parent(s)/caregiver(s) are requesting an exemption as this will be required for data collection. For example, what are the specific expectations they are concerned about? Let the parent(s)/caregiver(s) understand that we **cannot exempt specific expectations**.
2. Ensure that the reason why they are requesting an exemption actually applies to the grade level of their child. Does the curriculum for that grade level actually cover topics that the parent(s)/caregiver(s) are concerned about?
3. Clearly communicate exemption procedures with the parent/caregiver including;
 1. The entire Human Development and Sexual Health component of the Healthy Living strand will be exempted.
 2. References to, or conversations about, sexual health–related concepts among teachers, school staff, or other students outside formal instruction in Human Development and Sexual Health are not subject to this exemption.
 3. There will be no academic penalty to the student.
2. Ensure parent(s)/caregiver(s) understand that their child may still learn what was covered during the Human Development and Sexual Health component from their peers.
3. Identify the expectations that are of concern to the parent(s)/caregiver(s). *(This is for data collection purposes-it does not mean a child can be exempted from a specific expectation).*
4. Complete the data collection form identifying whether an exemption is still required. If an exemption is required, confirm with the parent/caregiver, the location for the supervision of the student during the exemption period.

Guidance and Speaking Points for the Meeting:

- The curriculum was developed the way it was to ensure it was meeting the health and safety needs of our students in today's world
- The curriculum was developed by professionals with students' health and safety in mind
- All of our students need to see themselves represented in their curriculum, which is why we encourage our educators to deliver the curriculum in its entirety
- This exemption applies to the direct, intentional, structured teaching that happens during Health class. These topics may be addressed across the curriculum and may come up at different times in class.

Supporting Conversations with Families re: AP1238

- Remind parents/caregivers that their child may learn about this content from their peers who may try to share what they learned using their own words.