

PROTOCOL FOR ADDRESSING REQUESTS FOR RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION

Code of Virginia Section § 22.1-254 on compulsory attendance, reflected in Alexandria City School Board Policy JEG, states that a school board shall excuse from attendance at school: “Any pupil who, together with his parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school. For the purposes of this subdivision, bona fide religious training or belief does not include essentially political, sociological or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code.”

Whenever there is a written request for religious exemption in lieu of compulsory school attendance requirements, the following procedures should be followed:

- 1) Within two days of receipt of such a request, the Superintendent shall appoint a designee to coordinate the process of gathering information for consideration by the Superintendent and School Board. This person will also serve as the point of contact to the parent or guardian.
- 2) Within five days of appointment, the designee shall acknowledge, by phone or in writing, confirmation of receipt of the request for religious exemption to the parents or legal guardians.
- 3) At that time, the designee shall schedule an appointment in-person with the parent or guardian to discuss the request, validate information in the letter, and obtain specific information using the interview form that will guide decision-making by the School Board. The designee shall interview the parents or guardians and impacted child/children over 12 years old. If the parents refuse to allow the child/ren to be interviewed, the refusal and reason for refusal should be documented for the record and shared with the Superintendent and School Board.
- 4) Upon completion of the interview, the designee shall review findings with the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent shall contact the Clerk of the School Board to add the religious exemption request to the agenda of the next available School Board meeting. The parents or guardians should be notified of the School Board meeting date, location, and time. They should also be told that the School Board may want to meet with them and the child prior to rendering a decision.
- 5) The School Board shall receive copies of all correspondence and interview results including a recommendation from the Superintendent prior to the scheduled School Board meeting. This item shall be placed as a Consent item with the understanding that the Board may exercise its right to meet with the parents or guardians in a Closed Session.
- 6) Upon reaching a decision, the Clerk of the Board shall send the parent or guardian a letter stating the Board’s decision. The Board is not required to justify its reason for approval or disapproval as part of its correspondence to the parent.
- 7) In the event that the parent refuses to abide by the School Board’s decision, the case will follow the normal procedures for addressing compulsory school attendance issues.

Established: June 11, 2015

Legal Ref.: Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, § 22.1-254.

Cross Ref.: JEG Exclusions and Exemptions from School Attendance

**Alexandria City Public Schools
Religious Exemption Interview Form**

Section 22.1-254B. Religious Exemption. The Code of Virginia provides that the School Board:

"Shall excuse from attendance at school any pupil who, together with his parents, by bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school." For purposes of this subdivision, bona fide religious training or belief does not include essentially political, sociological or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code.

Name of Designee: _____ Date of Interview: _____

Name(s) of Parent or Guardian: _____

Name(s) of Child(ren): _____ Birthdate: _____

_____ Birthdate: _____

Address: _____

Phone: home () _____ cell () _____

Parent Questions:

1) Please identify the local church or organization, if any, which embodies the religious training or beliefs that you hold:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Contact Person: _____

2. Are you a member of that church or organization? ___yes___no If yes, length of affiliation with that organization or adherence to the beliefs? ___years___months

3. Have your children ever attended any public, private, or religiously affiliated school? If so, when?

4. Explain how your request for religious exemption is grounded in a bona fide religious belief?

5. Are there specific courses or opportunities, either academic or extra-curricular, associated with the Alexandria City Public Schools that conflict with your religious beliefs or training? If so, explain.

6. Do you, yourself, intend to educate your children in the event a religious exemption is granted?

7. What is the source or sources of the curriculum which will be provided to your children, if any, in the event the religious exemption is granted?

8. Should your request for religious exemption be denied and your children compelled to attend public school, what religious ramifications do you foresee?

Child Interview Questions (Attach additional sheet for more than one child)

1) Do you participate in religious teachings? ___yes ___no If so, where?

2) Do you think that attending public school is against your religious belief? ___yes ___no?
Why?

Interviewer's Recommendation: _____Support Approval
_____Cannot Support Approval (Explain Why?)

ACPS 05/2014