



St. James-Assiniboia School Division

Great Schools for Growing and Learning

Statement from the SJASD Board of Trustees on Religious Instruction Petition

May 29, 2023

Over the last week, SJASD Trustees have received a number of queries from individuals regarding a petition to authorize religious instruction at Strathmillan School.

As always, we deeply appreciate the feedback we receive from our community members and beyond and would like to provide some clarity on this matter.

To begin, our schools remain committed to providing non-sectarian, non-discriminatory environments that respect the rights and beliefs of all students and their families and we acknowledge concerns regarding the historical complexities and harms associated with various religious groups.

As a public institution, we are required to create a [safe and caring](#) learning environment that includes respect for [human diversity](#). We are also required to [respect religious diversity](#).

As per section 80 of the [Public Schools Act](#), in the event that enough caregivers from a specific school sign a petition, the Board is required to pass a By-Law authorizing religious instruction in that school. Any faith group can petition the Board for religious instruction. Only the children of petitioners receive instruction.

With regards to Strathmillan School, we can confirm that the Board will be reviewing By-Law 326-23 at the June 6 Board meeting, which would authorize 30 minutes of religious instruction per week for the children of petitioners attending the school. The instruction would take place over the lunch hour so as not to interfere with classroom instruction. The Board would not be compensating the coordinator or officiant for this religious instruction.

Balancing respect for human diversity and respect for religious diversity is a complex matter. The authority to interpret and decide upon the application of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to provincial statutes rests with the Manitoba Court of King's Bench.

We would advise those with concerns regarding religious doctrine to seek out theological experts.

Any questions regarding the Public Schools Act or [guidelines](#) relating to the Act should be addressed to the province.

We thank you for your interest in the education of SJASD students.

Signed,

SJASD Board of Trustees