

New education policy for religion programs

Education Minister Marion Boyd has announced a policy which will permit public school boards to offer programs of education about religion that reflect the multifaceted nature of Ontario's society but are not indoctrinational.

"Our province enjoys great diversity. We can find strength in the constantly changing multifaceted nature of Ontario by understanding how the belief systems of the world's religions provide individuals and communities with meaning and a sense of purpose," Mrs. Boyd said.

"Programs in education about religion must ensure that children from different religious backgrounds learn how to grow together through an appreciation of their differences."

The policy was developed following a review of the Ontario Court of Appeal decision of January 30, 1990, regarding religious education.

These measures replace the interim policy which has been in effect since February 28, 1990, and include the following:

* Boards of education may provide programs of education about religion in grades 1 to 8 during the school day for up to 60 minutes per week.

* A resource document for grades 1-8 will be developed

in English and French and will be distributed to educators and other interested groups for comment within 18 months.

* Boards of education can continue to make space available in school buildings, as they do for various community-related activities, for indoctrinational religious classes outside the instructional program of the school day. The Charter of Rights, however, requires equality of treatment, and boards that exercise this option must make space available to religious groups on an equitable basis.

This policy, which will become effective January 1, 1991, does not affect schools operated by the Roman Catholic Separate School Boards. The parts of Regulation 262 which deal with religious education in elementary and secondary public schools will be revoked and amended to reflect the policy.

It was further announced that secondary schools may continue to provide an optional credit course in world religions, as specified in the History and Contemporary Studies curriculum guideline. In her announcement the Minister also made public the Report

on Religious Education in Ontario Public Elementary Schools which was submitted to the previous government by Dr. Glenn A. Watson.

Dr. Watson was asked to recommend curriculum options for an appropriate religious education policy for public elementary schools.

"Dr. Watson's recommendations were made without benefit of the court decision, which was announced just a day before he submitted his report," said Mrs. Boyd.

"While Dr. Watson recognized the necessity of a multi-faith approach to education about religion, one of his major recommendations is at variance with the court decision."

Legal counsel to the government advised that to devote between one-third and two-thirds of a program to the study of one particular religion, as suggested by Dr. Watson, would give primacy to that faith and would contravene the Charter as interpreted by the Court of Appeal.

"I believe that the policy can be seen within the context of the long-established vision of elementary and secondary public schools as open and accessible to all on an equal basis," commented Mrs. Boyd.

Increases in Canada Pension Plan benefits

Over 2.5 million Canada Pension Plan recipients will have their benefits increased effective January 1, 1991, the Honourable Perrin Beatty, Minister of National Health and Welfare announced recently. The annual adjustment, which this year is 4.8 per cent, is based on increases in the Consumer Price Index, Statistic Canada's cost-of-living measure.

The Minister also announced increases for people who become eligible for Canada Pension Plan benefits in 1991. Here, too, rates are increased each year to keep the benefits in line with general increases in salaries and wages.

For those who become eligible for benefits in 1991 the maximum monthly retirement pension at age 65 will be \$604.86. A contributor can begin receiving a retirement pension as early as age 60. The amount will be reduced for pensions beginning before age 65 and will be increased for those beginning after age 65.

The maximum amount for a person becoming eligible for a disability pension in 1991 will be \$743.64 per month while

benefits for disabled contributors' children and orphans of deceased contributors will be \$113.14 per month per child. Maximum benefits paid on behalf of contributors who die in 1991 will be \$339.96 for surviving spouses under age 65 and \$362.92 for surviving spouses aged 65 and over. Survivor benefits are no longer discontinued on remarriage. Those whose benefits were discontinued on remarriage can apply to have their benefits reinstated.

There is also a lump sum death benefit payable under the Canada Pension Plan; the maximum payable in respect of contributors who die in 1991 will be \$3,050.

Canada Pension Plan benefits are based on a person's actual earnings and contributions for the period during which that person could have contributed to the Plan. There are yearly minimum and maximum earnings levels between which persons contribute. For 1991 these levels are \$3,000 and \$30,500 respectively. The maximum contributions are \$632.50 for employees during 1991.

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This Act covers all municipal corporations and a wide range of local boards - including those in education, police, health, roads, public utilities and conservation authorities.

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While the law provides for a right of access to these records, limited by certain specific exemptions, it also protects your personal information. Each organization will have an individual - designated as the Information and Privacy Coordinator - who can assist you when making a request.

If, however, you are not satisfied with decisions, the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (1-800-387-0073) will be available to review the case.

Information, about this Act, can be obtained from:

The Freedom of Information and Privacy Branch,
Management Board Secretariat,
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DATED this 10th day of December, A.D., 1990.

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