



LONDON COUNCIL OF IMAMS

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

London Council of Imams Statement Regarding School Activities in June

May 31, 2023

Assalamu alaykum,

As Muslims, our faith tradition is built upon the essential precept of *haya'*, or modesty, which lies at the core of our beliefs. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ indicated such when he stated, "Every religion (*deen*) has an innate character (*khuluq*) and the innate character of Islam is modesty (*haya'*)."

Recently, a statement was published signed by many Muslim scholars in North America entitled "Navigating Differences" that is an attempt to offer a sense of clarity to the Muslim community and others regarding what Islam states unequivocally regarding sexual and gender norms from a theological perspective.¹

The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) has repeatedly consulted and worked with Muslim faith and community leaders to address the concerns of Muslim parents, students and staff who attend within the system, and for this we express our deep gratitude and appreciation to them. As a secular school board, public schools should not be taking positions to promote a certain set of values and beliefs over or at the expense of others. The TVDSB continues to reach out to the Muslim community to address concerns that arise while they navigate the mandate of the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Equity Strategy* to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students. All children have the fundamental right to be free from any form of discrimination. The London Council of Imams (LCI), along with other community leaders, will continue to work closely with the TVDSB Director, Superintendents and Equity Team members to ensure that our voices are presented in the best of manners while taking active steps to preserve the rights, beliefs and values of our children. The following points should be taken into consideration:

1. There is a clear TVDSB policy of religious accommodation that parents may avail of to exempt their children from activities that are deemed contrary to our faith values and beliefs, without being portrayed as discriminatory or hateful should parents choose to exercise this right for their children. As per this policy, parents are encouraged to make their own decisions in consultation

¹ This statement can be read in full at www.navigatingdifferences.com. Although this document goes against a number of currently accepted societal norms related to morality and sexuality, it clearly states a rejection of "the notion that moral disagreement amounts to intolerance or incitement of violence." As we live in a society that guarantees the freedom to practice our faith, the statement affirms "our right to express our beliefs while simultaneously recognizing our constitutional obligation to exist peacefully with those whose beliefs differ from ours." We also acknowledge that there are many nuances not addressed by the statement since it was not intended to be a comprehensive treatise on the subject. Nevertheless, the London Council of Imams agrees with and fully endorses the content of this document.

with their children's school in regards to the best practices to safeguard their religious beliefs and practices. When it comes to activities related to "Pride Month" in the month of June, parents play an integral role in the education of their children and are critical to empowering them to remain steadfast on their faith and beliefs. For this reason, the LCI is not in the position to direct parents on whether to choose to have your child(ren) to attend or be absent from school and parents should use their discretion to decide whether to keep their children at home or send them on certain days. It is also important to understand that such activities are not limited to a single day or even a month.

2. The LCI will offer assistance to the TVDSB regarding culturally integrative training to better understand how to accommodate for the diverse needs of Muslim students.
3. Consultations are also being done with Muslim educators within the TVDSB to provide perspectives on materials that are not deemed as culturally responsive to Muslim students while discussing what concrete steps can be taken to address this in a teaching environment.
4. To assist parents in this regard, the London Council of Imams will be holding a series of lectures directed towards our youth to help provide faith-based clarifications on sexuality and gender issues and provide a forum to ask questions related to these sensitive matters. The first such session will be held on Saturday, June 17 from 11 am to 2 pm (details for registration and location will follow). Another follow-up session will be held specifically for parents to help them navigate such issues with their children towards the end of the month. Such sessions may become a regular activity throughout the year if there is sufficient need and demand from the community.
5. The LCI understands the challenges that our parents are currently facing, and we ask you to use your wisdom and patience when addressing these matters. At the same time, parents are encouraged to approach their school administrators regarding such concerns and to discuss options for accommodations. Furthermore, the LCI can be approached to provide direction and assistance in support of religious accommodation requests for your children. In the event that any parent or student faces direct or indirect actions or statements of discrimination from teachers or staff at your children's school, you may write to us at admin@londonimams.ca and we will bring forth your concerns through the proper channels in a timely manner to the TVDSB.

It remains imperative that we continue to make du'a during these difficult times, while taking the proper means to protect our faith and values. We continue to repeat often that Allah is sufficient for us and is the Best of Protectors (*hasbuna Allah wa ni'ma l-wakil*).

Signed,

The London Council of Imams

990 GAINSBOROUGH RD, LONODN, ONTARIO, CANADA, N6H 5L4

Email: admin@londonimams.ca