

**REGULATIONS FOR ADDRESSING REQUESTS FOR RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION TO
COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

Code of Virginia Section § 22.1-254 on compulsory attendance, reflected in Alexandria City School Board (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.”

Home instruction (homeschooling) of students must occur in accordance with Policy LBD - Home Instruction. Home instruction does not require a religious exemption to compulsory attendance.

Whenever there is a written request for religious exemption in lieu of compulsory school attendance requirements, the following procedures are followed to establish if the request is due to a bona fide religious training or belief that warrants an exception to compulsory attendance as established in the Code of Virginia:

1. Parents or guardians must submit a written request for exemption to the Clerk of the School Board (“the Clerk”) stating the reasons which indicate the parents and the child are conscientiously opposed to school attendance, which must include the name, age, address and phone number/email for the student and his or her parents, as well as the residential address of the student if different from his or her parents. The parents or guardians shall also submit with the written request a detailed letter from a friend or relative along with a letter from a member of a faith or religion, including pastors, deacons or others knowledgeable in the faith system, demonstrating the sincerity of the parents’ and child’s beliefs and length of time the parents and child have held these beliefs. The exemption may only be requested for children of compulsory school age.
2. The Clerk shall add the religious exemption request to the agenda of the next available Board meeting. The parents or legal guardians should be notified of the Board meeting date, location, and time. They shall also be informed if the Board may wish to meet with them and the child prior to rendering a decision for the purpose of determining whether the conscientious opposition to attendance at school is based on religious principles and whether the belief is bona fide.
3. Upon the Board reaching a decision that the request qualifies as a bona fide religious exemption under the Code of Virginia, the Clerk or designee of the Board shall send the parent/legal guardian a letter stating the Board’s decision.
4. In the event that the parent refuses to abide by the Board’s decision, the case will follow the normal procedures for addressing compulsory school attendance issues.

Once granted, the exemption applies for future years for that child only. Parents or guardians must complete the religious exemption procedure for each child of school age.

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48 Established: June 11, 2015

49 Amended: May 9, 2024

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

53 Va. Op. Att’y Gen. 1988

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55 Cross Ref.: JEG Exclusions and Exemptions from School Attendance