

I. STANDARDS FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The First Amendment permits discussion in the schools of religious thoughts and customs as part of a religiously neutral program of education. The following procedures on religion and religious practices in the schools are provided in order to protect individual rights without endorsing religion.

A. Religion in the Curriculum

The secular teaching about religions and about the history and practice of religion is permitted. Teachers must use fairness and objectivity whenever teaching about a religion and may not promote or disparage a particular religion or religions in general.

1. When teaching subjects in the curriculum, such as literature, history, the humanities, and the arts, teachers may include applicable instruction about the role of the religion.
2. Teachers may provide instruction on historic, political, or literary documents that have religious references embedded in them, if such documents are otherwise applicable to and appropriate for the course.
3. Religion classes that are historical survey courses and offer an elective credit in social studies may be offered as part of the high school curriculum.
4. In scheduling outside speakers for classes and school assembly programs, school administrators may not discriminate on the basis of the religious beliefs of the speaker. Outside speakers may not lead students in prayer or other religious observances, promote religious belief, or disparage lack of religious belief during school classes and assemblies.

B. Religious Holidays, Holiday Symbols, and Holiday Music

1. When planning school activities that acknowledge religious holidays, school employees must seek to foster attitudes of appreciation and respect for the diversity of religious beliefs in the school community, in our state, and in our nation. School programs, teaching materials, and the display of holiday symbols should represent diverse beliefs, should not focus exclusively on the beliefs and traditions of one religion, and should not require students to participate in activities that are in conflict with the student's personal beliefs.
2. School administrators will take into account the possible effects of religious holidays on school attendance when planning school activity calendars.

When possible, examinations and other major events will not be scheduled on such holidays.

3. Holiday symbols, including religious symbols, may be used as teaching aids or resources as part of instruction about a religious holiday, such as Christmas or Hanukkah. Symbols that are used as examples of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday are to be displayed only on a temporary basis.
4. Use of music, art, literature, and drama related to religious holidays is permitted during school-sponsored activities if presented in a neutral and objective manner that focuses on the cultural and historical basis for a particular holiday. However, no student will be required to participate in these activities.
5. Classroom teachers should retain control of all presentations and activities in their classrooms. Classroom teachers who have questions about the suitability of materials or activities related to a holiday centered activity, including materials and activities proposed by parents or other volunteers, should consult with the school's principal for guidance.

C. Student and Employee Exercise of Religion

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the free exercise rights of students and employees. School officials, principals, and other administrative personnel must be sensitive to the religious beliefs of students and school employees when implementing school board policies and adopting procedures and guidelines to govern the day to day operation of the schools. School administrators shall not promote or criticize the religious beliefs or practices of students or school employees.

1. Students, while on school property or involved in a school activity, may voluntarily engage in the religious activities described below. However, a student may be prohibited from engaging in conduct that would (1) interfere with the duty of school officials to maintain order and discipline, to prevent disruption of the educational process, and to determine educational curriculum and assignments; (2) harass other persons or coerce other students to participate in the activity; or (3) otherwise infringe on the rights of another person.
 - a. Students may read religious material and pray, either silently or audibly and alone or with other students, to the same extent and under the same circumstances as students are permitted to silently or audibly read, reflect, meditate, or speak on nonreligious matters alone or with other students in school.

- b. Students may express, speak to, or attempt to share religious viewpoints in school to the same extent and under the same circumstances as students are permitted to express, speak to, or attempt to share viewpoints on nonreligious topics.
 - c. Students may express beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written or oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of the submission. Homework and classroom assignments will be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the board. A student will not be penalized or rewarded based on the religious views expressed in the student's work.
 - d. Subject to the requirements of policy 5210, Distribution and Display of Non-School Material, students may possess or distribute religious literature in school to the same extent and under the same circumstances, including reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, as students are permitted to possess or distribute literature on nonreligious topics.
 - e. Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs, or religious gatherings before, during, or after school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other noncurricular student groups and activities. Student religious groups will be provided the same access to school facilities for assembling as other noncurricular groups and will be permitted to advertise or announce meetings to the same extent as other noncurricular groups. Principals shall arrange for adequate supervision, if needed, of activities occurring on school grounds. The school or school system may disclaim school sponsorship of noncurricular groups and events in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in prayer or religious speech.
2. School employees may participate in religious activities on school property that are initiated by students at reasonable times before or after the instructional day when the employee is not on duty, so long as such activities are voluntary for all parties and do not conflict with the responsibilities of the employees. School employees who choose to participate in student-initiated religious activities in the schools should avoid any action that would lead students to believe that the school system endorses religion or specific religious activities; this is particularly true when participating in events taking place in elementary schools. Such employees must take any lawful steps required by the principal to avoid the appearance of impermissible endorsement. Employees assigned by the principal to supervise high school student-initiated religious clubs meeting

in accordance with the Equal Access Act (20 U.S.C. § 4071) should be present at such meetings in a nonparticipatory capacity only.

3. School employees supervising extracurricular activities, including coaches, may be present while a student or group of students exercises the voluntary right to pray as described in subsection C.1.a above and, if present, shall not be disrespectful of the student exercise of such rights and may adopt a respectful posture.
4. School personnel may read religious materials, including the Bible, and pray during their free time, engage in voluntary discussions with other staff members about religious issues, and carry or wear religious symbols when on duty at school, as long as it does not interfere with their work.

D. Maintaining School System Neutrality in Religious Matters

1. The school system and school employees acting in their official capacities shall not promote, conduct, sponsor, or endorse any form of religious indoctrination or exercise, including prayer, at school functions. This includes graduation ceremonies. The school system and its employees shall not coerce students or employees to participate in religious activities on or off school grounds. A moment of silence may be observed at school-controlled functions, activities, or events.
2. Parents, students, and other groups may organize and conduct voluntary baccalaureate services. Notice of any such services may be given by school administrators in the same manner as given for other community activities. Schools may not sponsor or conduct baccalaureate services and such services may not be held on school property during the school day. School facilities must be available for use by outside groups holding baccalaureate services to the same extent as such facilities are available for use for other community activities and as specified in policy 5030, Community Use of Facilities.

II. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If a student or the student's parent believes that the student's right to religious freedom, as described in this regulation or otherwise established by law, has been violated, the student or parent may file a grievance in accordance with policy 1740/4010, Student and Parent Grievance Procedure.

III. COMPLIANCE WITH THE FIRST AMENDMENT

The United States Constitution and North Carolina Constitution protect the right of an individual to choose his or her religious beliefs and prohibit any governmental action that may advance or inhibit such beliefs. Nothing in this regulation is intended to violate these

principles. Questions regarding implementation of this regulation should be directed to the superintendent who will confer, as necessary, with the board attorney to ensure legal compliance.

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Reviewed:

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