

Billings School District 2

INSTRUCTION

Religion and Religious Activities

In keeping with the United States and Montana Constitutions and judicial decisions, the District may not support any religion or endorse religious activity. At the same time, the District may not prohibit private religious expression by students. This policy provides direction to students and staff members about the application of these principles to student religious activity at school.

Student Prayer and Discussion

Students may pray individually or in groups and may discuss their religious views with other students, so long as they are not disruptive or coercive. The right to engage in voluntary prayer does not include the right to have a captive audience listen, to harass other students, or to force them to participate.

Staff Members

Staff members are representatives of the District and must “navigate the narrow channel between impairing intellectual inquiry and propagating a religious creed.” They may not encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, sponsor, participate in, or discriminate against a religious activity or an activity because of its religious content. Staff must remain officially neutral toward religious expression.

Graduation Ceremonies

The District may not prefer the beliefs of some students over the beliefs of others, coerce dissenters or nonbelievers, or communicate any endorsement of religion.

District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy to give prayers at graduation. Furthermore, District officials may not organize or agree to requests for prayer by other persons at graduation, including requests from students.

Baccalaureate Ceremonies

Students and their families may organize baccalaureate services, at which attendance must be entirely voluntary. Organizers of baccalaureate services may rent and have access to school facilities on the same basis as other private groups but may not receive preferential treatment. The District may not be identified as sponsoring or endorsing baccalaureate services. District funds, including paid staff time, may not be used directly or indirectly to support or subsidize any religious services.

Assemblies, Extracurricular and Athletic Events

District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy, staff members, or outsiders to give prayers at school-sponsored assemblies and extracurricular or athletic events. District officials also may not organize or agree to student requests for prayer at assemblies and other school-sponsored events. Furthermore, prayer may not be broadcast over the school public address system, even if the prayer is nonsectarian, nonproselytizing, and initiated by students.

Student Religious Expression and Assignments

Students may express their individual religious beliefs in reports, tests, homework, and projects. Staff members should judge their work by ordinary academic standards, including substance, relevance, appearance, composition, and grammar. Student religious expression should neither be favored nor penalized.

Religion in the Curriculum

Staff members may teach students about religion in history, art, music, literature, and other subjects in which religious influence has been and continues to be felt. However, staff members may not teach religion or advocate religious doctrine or practice. The prohibition against teaching religion extends to curricular decisions that promote religion or religious beliefs.

School programs, performances, and celebrations must serve an educational purpose. The inclusion of religious music, symbols, art, or writings is permitted if the religious content has a historical or independent educational purpose that contributes to the objectives of the approved curriculum. School programs, performances, and celebrations cannot promote, encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, or discriminate against a religion or religious activity and cannot be oriented religiously or to a religious holiday.

Student Religious Clubs

Students may organize clubs to discuss or promote religion, subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on other student-organized clubs.

Distribution of Religious Literature

Students may distribute religious literature to their classmates, subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on the distribution of other non-school literature (Policy 3222). Outsiders may not distribute religious or other literature to students on school property, consistent with and pursuant to District policy on solicitations (Policy 4321).

Religious Holidays

Staff members may teach objectively about religious holidays and about the religious symbols, music, art, literature, and drama that accompany the holidays. They may celebrate the historical aspects of the holidays but may not observe them as religious events.

Accommodation of Religious Beliefs

Parents may ask to review the materials to be used in classrooms. The District will reasonably accommodate requests to exclude students from classroom discussions that are contrary to the student's religious beliefs.

Policy History:

First Reading:	January 19, 2004 – Board of Trustees
Second Reading:	March 8, 2004 – Education Committee (Also endorsed by the School/Community Committee on June 14, 2004)
Third Reading:	June 21, 2004 – Board of Trustees
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