

Religious-Related Activities and Practices

The board recognizes that views and opinions regarding the relationship of the schools and religion are diverse. While community opinions are important in shaping policy, the board must give primary credence to the United States and Washington State constitutions, state law and the decisions made by the respective courts when establishing guidelines for making decisions regarding religious-related activities and practices. The board further accepts the declaration of the State Board of Education that “all students . . . possess the constitutional right to the free exercise of religion and to have their schools free from sectarian control or influence.” To this end, the board establishes the following guidelines to preserve the constitutional rights of all students:

- A. Instruction about religious matters and/or using religious materials will be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional manner and will serve a secular educational purpose. History, sociology, literature, the arts and other disciplines taught in school may have a religious dimension. Study of these disciplines, including the religious dimension, will give neither preferential nor disparaging treatment to any single religion or to religion in general and must not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes.
- B. Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion will seek the same neutrality, objectivity and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, materials and activities should be sensitive to America’s pluralistic society and should educate rather than indoctrinate. Instructional activities should meet the three-part test established and used by the U.S. Supreme Court to determine constitutionality: (1) the activity must have a secular purpose; (2) the activity’s principle or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) the activity must not excessively involve the school in religion. This constitutional restriction does not preclude a student from expressing his/her views relative to belief or non-belief about a religious-related issue in compositions, reports, music, art, debate and classroom discussion, when consistent with the assignment.

All religious-related instructional materials and/or activities must relate to secular student learning goals or standards.

Staff will avoid assigning work that emphasizes the religious aspects of a holiday. Individual students should be allowed, at their own direction, to use religious personages, events or symbols as a vehicle for artistic expression, if consistent with the assignment. State law prohibits staff from requiring that students reveal, analyze or critique their religious beliefs, from grading academic work on its religious expression if any, from censoring or imposing consequences on students who engage in religious expression in accordance with the law, or from imposing the religious beliefs of the staff member on students.

- C. A student may decline to participate in a school activity that is contrary to his/her religious convictions.

If noncurriculum-related student groups are permitted to meet on school premises immediately before or after school hours, students will be permitted to meet to discuss

religious, political, philosophical or other issues provided such group meetings are student-initiated and student-managed in compliance with Board Policy 2153, Non-Curriculum Related Student Groups.

- D. Religious groups may rent school facilities under the policy providing for facilities rental. Activities of such groups will be clearly separated from school sponsored activities so that the school district does not support or appear to support the establishment of religion.
- E. A student may distribute religious literature under the same conditions that other literature may be distributed on campus provided that such distribution does not intrude on the operation of the school.
- F. Material and/or announcements promoting religion may not be distributed by non-students or on behalf of groups or individuals who are not students.
- G. Religious services, programs or assemblies will not be conducted in school facilities during school hours or in connection with any school sponsored or school related activity. Speakers and/or programs that convey a religious or devotional message are prohibited. This restriction does not preclude the presentation of choral or musical assemblies which may use religious music or literature as a part of the program or assembly.
- H. Musical, artistic and dramatic presentation which have a religious theme may be included in course work and programs on the basis of their particular artistic and educational value or traditional secular usage. They will be presented in a neutral, non-devotional manner, be related to the objective of the instructional program, and be accompanied by comparable artistic works of a nonreligious nature.

Since a variety of activities is included as part of a holiday theme, care must be exercised to focus on the historical and secular aspects of the holiday rather than its devotional meanings. Music programs will not use the religious aspect of a holiday as the underlying message or theme. Pageants, plays and other dramatic activities will not be used to convey religious messages. Religious symbols such as nativity scenes, if used, will be displayed in conjunction with a variety of secular holiday symbols so that the total presentation emphasizes the cultural rather than religious significance of the holiday.

- I. A student, upon the request of a parent, may be excused to participate in religious instruction for a portion of a school day provided the activity is not conducted on school property. (Credit will not be granted for such instruction.)
- J. Upon receipt of a parent(s) request, a student will be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.
- K. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.
- L. As a matter of individual liberty, a student may of his/her own volition engage in private, non-disruptive prayer at any time not in conflict with learning activities. School staff will neither encourage, nor discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive oral or silent prayer or any other form of devotional activity.
- M. Commencement exercises will be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.
- N. There will be no school sponsorship of baccalaureate services. Interested parents and students may plan and organize baccalaureate exercises provided that the service is not promoted through the school and staff, and student participation is voluntary.

Students, parents and staff who are aggrieved by practices or activities conducted in the school or district may register their concern with the building principal or superintendent.

Cross References

3224 – Student Dress
3223 – Freedom of Assembly
3220 – Freedom of Expression
3122 – Excused and unexcused Absences
2153 – Non-Curriculum-Related Student Groups

Legal References

U.S. Constitution First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment
Wash. Constitution Art. I, 11
Wash. Constitution Art. 9, Sec. 4 and Art. 26
RCW 28A.600.025 Students’ rights of religious expression – Duty of superintendent of public instruction to inform school districts
WAC 392-400-227 School district rules defining students’ religious rights

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