

School Prayer at Commencement/Graduation and Baccalaureate Ceremonies

The following policy prescribes the method by which employees and agents of the District shall protect the First Amendment rights of students, employees, and citizens of the District as it pertains to Commencement / Graduation and Baccalaureate Ceremonies.

Definitions

- (a) “Student-initiated” refers to any action that is taken only after students have asked that such an action be taken;
- (b) “Student-delivered” refers to any message spoken by a student of the public school at which the message is delivered.

Commencement/Graduation Ceremony

1. School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation or select speakers in a manner that favors religious speech. Subject to the provisions of Paragraph 3 below, the content of any speaker’s address shall be determined exclusively by the speaker. Neither the class officers, the District, nor any District staff member shall implement any selection process (including student- elections) or exercise any editorial control to determine whether or not a political, philosophical, religious, or other message shall be presented during the address. School officials shall include in the graduation program the following disclaimer:

The content of any remarks by guest speakers and/or student speakers does not reflect the views of the Indian River School Board or School District, or its staff or other students.

2. Student-initiated, student-delivered, voluntary messages by the Valedictorian, the Salutatorian and/or the Senior Class President may be permitted during graduation or commencement ceremonies. Subject to the provisions of Paragraph 3 below, the content of their respective messages shall be determined by the student delivering the message. No school district staff members shall exclude, include, or otherwise discriminate for or against any student on the basis of the political, philosophical, or religious views that the student intends to deliver or does deliver.
3. Notwithstanding any of the above, the District, through its agents and employees, has authority to take all actions necessary to maintain order and discipline on district premises in order to protect the well-being of all persons present. No graduation speaker shall use or exploit the opportunity to speak at graduation to proselytize, advance or convert anyone, or to derogate or otherwise disparage any particular faith or belief.

Baccalaureate Ceremony

1. Baccalaureate services may be allowed on District property, but may not be initiated, organized, sponsored, conducted, or promoted by the District staff.

Adopted 10/19/04

Revised 6/27/06, 12/18/07, 6/22/20

Reviewed 4/21/15