# 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. 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 hereby establishes the following guidelines to preserve the rights of all students within the framework of the respective constitutions.

A. Instruction about religious matters and/or using religious materials shall be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional manner and shall 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, shall 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.

   Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion shall 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 principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) the activity must not impose excessive involvement on the part of the school in order to maintain a neutral position towards the advancement of religion. This constitutional restriction shall 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 shall 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.

B. A student may decline to participate in a school activity that is contrary to his/her religious convictions upon request of the student or the student's parent.

C. If noncurriculum-related student groups are permitted to meet on school premises immediately before or after school hours, students shall 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 shall 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 the 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 shall 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 presentations 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 shall 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 shall not use the religious aspect of a holiday as the underlying message or theme. Pageants, plays, and other dramatic activities shall not be used to convey religious messages. Religious symbols such as nativity scenes, if used, shall 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 shall not be granted for such instruction.)

J. Upon receipt of a parent(s) request, a student shall 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 shall

neither encourage, or discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive oral or silent prayer or any other form of devotional activity.

M. Commencement exercises shall be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.

N. There shall 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 district superintendent.

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| Legal References: | U.S. Constitution | First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment |
| | Wash. Constitution | Art. I, § 11 |
| | Wash. Constitution | Art. 9, § 4 and Art. 26 |
| | RCW 28A.600.025 | Students' rights of religious expression — Duty of superintendent of public instruction to inform school districts |
| Cross References: | Board Policy 2153 | Non-Curriculum Related Student Groups |
| | Board Policy 2331 | Controversial Issues/Guest Speakers |
| | Board Policy 3122 | Excused and Unexcused Absences |
| | Board Policy 3220 | Freedom of Expression |
| | Board Policy 3224 | Student Dress |
| | Board Policy 4220 | Complaints Concerning Staff or Programs |
| | Board Policy 4235 | Public Performances |
| | Board Policy 4237 | Contests, Advertising and Promotions |
| | Board Policy 4260 | Use of School Facilities |

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