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.

Student Prayer and Discussion

Students may pray individually or in groups and may discuss their religious views with other students, as 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 or to harass other students. Students may pray silently in the classroom, except when they are expected to be involved in classroom instruction or activities.

Staff Members

Staff members may not encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, sponsor, participate in, or discriminate against a religious activity or an activity because of its religious content while in the course of performing official duties of that staff member's position(s) with the District.

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, non-proselytizing, 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. A student may read the Bible or other religious material during free reading time or when self-selected and consistent with a classroom or course requirements.

Graduation Ceremonies

In order to assure the appropriateness and dignity of the occasion, the District sponsors and pays for graduation ceremonies and retains ultimate control over their structure and content.

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. 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.

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 and 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 religion.

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 which 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 which 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 to religion or a religious holiday.

Student Religious Clubs

Students may organize clubs to discuss or promote religion, subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions 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 the District imposes on distribution of other non-school literature. Outsiders may not distribute religious or other literature to students on school property, consistent with and pursuant to the District policy on solicitations.

Religious Holidays

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

Legal Reference: *Kennedy v. Bremertson Sch. Dist.*, 142 S. Ct. 2407 (2022)
Art. II, Sec. 5, Montana Constitution - Freedom of religion
§ 20-7-112, MCA Sectarian publications prohibited, religious materials allowed, prayer permitted (*revised by House Bills 744, 745)*

Policy History:
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