

Instruction

Religion-Related Activities and Practices

The Board recognizes our community includes a range of religious and spiritual 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 constitution, 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.

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. However, students are free to express their 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.

- B. All religion-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 the student's religious convictions.

- D. If non-curriculum-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.
- E. 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.
- F. 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 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 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 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.
- I. Since a variety of activities are 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 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.

- J. 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.)
- K. Upon receipt of a parent(s) request, a student will be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.
- L. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.
- M. As a matter of individual liberty, a student may of the student's 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.
- N. Commencement exercises will be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.
- O. 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, Superintendent, or designee.

Cross References:	Policy 2153	Non-Curriculum- Related Student Groups
	Policy 3122	Excused and Unexcused Absences
	Policy 3220	Freedom of Expression
	Policy 3223	Freedom of Assembly
	Policy 3224	Student Dress
	Policy 4060	Distribution of Information
	Policy 4220	Complaints Concerning Staff or Programs
	Policy 4235	Public Performances
	Policy 4237	Contests, Advertising and Promotions
	Policy 4260	Use of School Facilities

Legal References:	U.S. Constitution First Amendment, Fourteenth 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

Classification: Encouraged

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