



Capital School District

Board of Education Policy

Section: Instruction
Title: Religion Policy
Policy #: 600-01
Date Approved: 12/05/12
Date Revised: 9/19/12

Purpose:

To articulate issues of religion within the school and classroom setting.

Religion

Observances
Displays
Curriculum
Equal Access
Sponsorship
Prayer
Moments of Silence
Release Time
Expression

Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs

(The District will adhere to Federal and State regulations pertaining to religious observances in public schools.)

No religious belief or non-belief shall be promoted, or disparaged, by the District. Instead, the District encourages all students and staff members to appreciate and be tolerant of the religious views of others. The District shall foster understanding and mutual respect regarding culture, economic backgrounds, and religious beliefs. In this spirit of tolerance, students and staff shall be excused from participating in practices contrary to their religious beliefs, unless there are clear issues of overriding concern preventing such an excuse.

The District recognizes the educational goals of advancing student knowledge and appreciation of the role our religious heritage played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

Religious Holidays

The District will:

- Explain the historical and contemporary values and the origin of religious holidays in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.

- Permit music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes or basis as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner, as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday, and in a manner which makes it clear the District is not endorsing or encouraging a religious belief.
- Permit the use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, crèche, symbols of Native American religions or other symbols that are a part of a religious holiday (including Christmas, Easter, Passover, Hanukkah, St. Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Thanksgiving, and Halloween) as a teaching aid or resource provided such symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.
- Prepare the school district's calendar so as to minimize conflicts with religious holidays which result in the absences of so many students the educational process is disrupted.

Religion in the Curriculum

Religious institutions and orientations are central to human experience. An education excluding such a significant aspect of human experience is incomplete. It is essential the teaching about – and not of – religion be conducted in a factual, objective, and respectful manner.

The District will:

- Refer to religious influence of literature, music, drama, and the arts curriculum and in school activities only to the extent such references are essential to a complete understanding of the learning experience in such fields of study.
- Refer to religious themes in the arts, literature, and history only to the extent necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas. Such references should never foster any particular religious tenets, or demean any religious beliefs.
- Accommodate student-initiated expressions to question or assignments which reflect student beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme. For example, students are free to express religious belief, or non-belief, in compositions, art forms, music, speech, and debate.

EQUAL ACCESS TO DISTRICT FACILITIES

Equal Access Act

If a group of students in a public secondary school engages in activities not directly related to any course offered by the school, and is permitted to meet at the school during non-instructional times, the Equal Access Act requires that the school permit all such student groups to meet at the school without regard to the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.

The District permits non-curriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during non-instructional times.

Limitations on Meetings

The following limitations apply to meetings:

1. The District retains authority to prohibit meetings that would materially and substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school.
2. The District may maintain order and discipline of the school premises, and protect the well being of students and faculty.
3. Faculty monitors may not participate in any religious meetings, and the Act prohibits school sponsorship of any religious meetings. This means that school officials may not promote, lead, or participate in any such meetings. The assignment of a teacher, administrator, or other school employee to the meeting is limited to oversight, and is merely to insure order and good behavior.
4. The District will not require that any employee attend such a meeting if the content of the speech at the meeting is contrary to that employee's beliefs.
5. The District will make it clear that its recognition of a religious club is not an endorsement of the views of the club's participants.

Participation of Non-School Personnel

The Act provides that non-school persons may not direct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups. The meetings of any such religious groups must be voluntary and student initiated. If such meetings are conducted and controlled by non-school personnel, the District will refuse to permit the meetings.

School Sponsorship

The District will not sponsor a religious club. Such student clubs are, however, entitled to the same access to the school newspaper, bulletin boards, and the public address system offered to non-religious clubs.

ACCOMMODATION OF PRAYER DURING INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

The District may excuse students from class to fulfill a religious obligation of a special purpose or event provided such does not impose a material burden on other students in the class.

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

If a school has a "minute of silence" or other quiet periods during the school day, students are free to pray silently, or not to pray, during these periods of time. Teachers and other school

employees may neither encourage nor discourage students from praying during such time periods.

STUDENT PRAYER DURING NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the education program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. Among other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other non-instructional time to the same extent they may engage in nonreligious activities. While school authorities may impose rules of order and educational restriction on student activities, they may not discriminate against student prayer or religious speech in applying such rules and restrictions.

RELEASED TIME FOR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Absence of a student during school hours for religious education outside school property will be allowed provided the student's parent or guardian submits a written request to the principal, and the instruction meets the following requirements:

1. The religious instruction must be under the sponsorship of a religious body or group. Students must be registered for the course, and file a copy of the registration with the principal who may periodically request student's attendance reports from the course's sponsors.
2. Absence for religious instruction may not exceed one hour per week, at a time set by the District.

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION AND PRAYER IN CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such work shall be judged by ordinary educational concerns identified by the school. Such work shall not be displayed, or presented to other students, in a manner which suggests District endorsement of religious beliefs.

PRAYER BY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

When acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, teachers, school administrators, and other school employees are prohibited by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment from encouraging or discouraging prayer, and from participating in such activity with students. Teachers may, however, take part in religious activities where the overall context makes clear that they are not participating in their official capacities. Before school or during lunch, for example, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or Bible study to the same extent they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, teachers may participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies.