

The North Thurston School District shall remain neutral in matters involving religion. The District will adhere to the following guidelines:

- 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 a 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.

- C. School resources, including facilities, real property, bulletin boards, and communication systems may be used by religious groups or for religious purposes only in accordance with procedures developed by the Superintendent or designee. Such use must be outside of school hours or when allowable use will not interfere with the school program in compliance with Board Policy 4260, Use of School Facilities.
- D. 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.
- E. A student, upon the request of a parent/guardian, may be excused to participate in religious instruction for a portion of a school day provided the activity is not conducted on school property and provided that the student's regular education program is not disrupted. Credit shall not be granted for such instruction.
- F. When scheduling important school activities and testing, the District and its schools shall attempt to avoid dates which conflict with religious holidays that may be observed by some students.
- G. Material and/or announcements promoting religion may not be distributed by non-students or on behalf of groups or individuals who are not students.
- 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 in compliance with Board Policy 4060, Distribution of Materials.
- H. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.
- I. 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.

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 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 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.

- J. 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. Staff and student participation in baccalaureate is voluntary.

Neither the District nor individual schools shall conduct or sanction invocations, benedictions or prayer at any school activities including graduation.

- K. 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, nor discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive oral or silent prayer or any other form of devotional activity.

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.

Implemented: December 15, 2010

North Thurston Public Schools
Board of Directors

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NTPS Cabinet