

COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY AND RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

A. Purpose and Scope

The District shall maintain neutrality toward religion while respecting the diverse religious and non-religious beliefs of students, families, employees, volunteers, or members of the community.

The District and its employees shall neither endorse nor inhibit religion, nor show hostility toward religious or non-belief. Proper accommodation of religion does not constitute endorsement.

This policy applies to all District programs, activities, and workplaces.

B. Student Religious Expression

Students have the right to express their religious - or non-religious beliefs freely, as long as such expression is voluntary, non-disruptive, and does not infringe on the rights of others or appear to be school-sponsored.

C. Student Religious Accommodations

Parents/guardians have the option of opting their child out of units within the health or sex education curriculum as provided in Board policy IHAM, and further opting their child out of specific course material they find objectionable as provided in Board policy IGE.

Requests for other student accommodation under this policy should be addressed in the first instance to the teacher, coach or other employee supervising the activity. If the response is unsatisfactory, the student or parent/guardian may request review by the School Principal. If the response is still unsatisfactory, a report or complaint may be made pursuant to Board policy ACA.

Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to:

1. excused absences for religious observance;
2. make-up work opportunities;
3. dietary accommodations;
4. modifications for attire or grooming; and
5. permission for private, non-disruptive, prayer.

D. Employee Religious Expression

1. Private Expression. Employees and volunteers may engage in private religious expression when:
 - a. They are not performing core or primary instructional or supervisory duties, and
 - b. The activity is comparable to permitted secular conduct.
2. Restrictions in Official Capacity. Employees and volunteers shall not engage in any religious activities that:

- a. interfere with their core duties at the time, or
- b. cause a substantial interference with their official duties or with school operations.
examples of restricted activities include:
 - Leading students in prayer or religious exercise during core duties, including periods where supervision of the students is a primary function;
 - Using the employee/volunteer's position to encourage or coerce student participation
 - Creating the appearance of school endorsement of the religious activity.

E. Employee Religious Accommodations

The District will reasonably accommodate employees' sincerely held religious beliefs, observances, and practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship, defined as substantial increased costs or significant operational disruption.

Requests for accommodation shall be submitted in writing to the Business Administrator and reviewed promptly through an interactive, individualized process. If, after engaging in the process, the employee is dissatisfied with the result, s/he may submit a report or complaint pursuant to Board policy ACA.

Examples of accommodations for employees include, but are not limited to: (1) schedule adjustments; (2) leave for religious observance; (3) dress or grooming exceptions; (4) private space for prayer.

F. Facilities Use

School District facilities that are made available for community use shall be provided to religious groups on the same terms as other community organizations, without discrimination based on viewpoint. However, such use shall be strictly non-school-sponsored and shall not create the appearance of endorsement by the District.

G. Training and Dissemination

The Superintendent shall ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities under this policy, and shall ensure that information regarding religious accommodation is included in student handbooks.

Legal References:

New Hampshire Constitution, Part I, Art. 5

20 U.S.C. 7904 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001)

RSA 189:1-b, Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of Religion

Legal References Disclaimer: *These references are not intended to be considered part of this policy, nor should they be taken as a comprehensive statement of the legal basis for the Board to enact this policy, nor as a complete recitation of related legal authority. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.*

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