

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. This policy provides direction to students and staff members about the application of these principles to student religious activity at school.

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, to harass other students or to force them to participate. Students may pray silently in the classroom, except when they are expected to be involved in classroom instruction or activities.

Staff Members

Staff members are representatives of the District and must “navigate the narrow channel between impairing intellectual inquiry and propagating a religious creed.” They may not encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, sponsor, participate in or discriminate against a religious activity or an activity because of its religious content. They must remain officially neutral toward religious expression.

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.

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 an 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.

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.

Release Time for Religious Instruction

The District may provide for a religious instruction release time program under which a pupil may be released upon written request of the parent or guardian, except that no such program shall take place on public school property. Such written request must be renewed annually, and the Board will determine the amount of time that any pupil will be released for religious instructions. Such release shall not adversely affect the pupil's attendance.

Policy History:

Adopted on:

Revised on: 11 July 2016