

This procedure is designed to assist principals, teachers, and other school employees to implement policy 3515, Religion in the Schools. The United States Constitution and North Carolina Constitution protect the right of an individual to choose his or her religious beliefs and prohibit any governmental action that may advance or inhibit such beliefs. Nothing in this regulation is intended to violate these principles. However, this regulation cannot anticipate every possible question or fact situation that might arise concerning religion in the schools. School employees are encouraged to consult with their immediate supervisor, or the superintendent regarding any question about religion in the schools that is not clearly answered by this regulation.

I. STANDARDS FOR RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

A. Religion in the Curriculum

1. The First Amendment permits the study of the role of religion as it relates to literature, history, culture, and the arts. Teachers may discuss religion in a neutral and objective manner as part of a secular program of education. Teachers may not promote or disparage a particular religion, religions in general, or the lack of religious beliefs.
2. Teachers may provide instruction on historic, political, or literary documents that include religious references if such documents are otherwise applicable to and appropriate for the course being taught.
3. When scheduling outside speakers for classes and school assembly programs, school employees will select speakers who will address topics that align with the curriculum and who are appropriate for the age and maturity of the students in the audience. Outside speakers may not lead students in prayer or other religious observances or promote or disparage religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs during school classes and assemblies.
4. Teachers should always consult with their principal when inviting outside speakers to address their students. If the principal has any question as to the appropriateness of a speaker, the topic or the age of the intended audience he/she should consult with the superintendent.

B. Holidays and Celebrations at School

1. School curriculum, programs, and activities may acknowledge religious holidays but may not promote or endorse religious belief or require or coerce students to participate in holiday related activities or performances. When planning school activities that acknowledge religious holidays,

school employees must seek to foster attitudes of appreciation and respect for the diversity of religious beliefs in the school community, in the state, and in the nation.

2. Holiday symbols, including religious symbols, may be used as teaching aids or resources as part of neutral instruction about a religious holiday, such as Christmas or Hanukkah. Symbols that are used as examples of the cultural and religious heritage of a holiday are to be displayed only on a temporary basis. The display of holiday symbols should represent diverse beliefs and should not focus exclusively on the beliefs and traditions of one religion.
3. Use of music, art, or literature acknowledging religious holidays is permitted during school-sponsored activities if presented in a neutral and objective manner that focuses on the cultural and historical basis for a particular holiday. Such activities may not promote or endorse belief in a particular religion or focus exclusively on the beliefs and traditions of one religion.
4. Classroom teachers should retain control of all presentations and activities in their classrooms. Students retain the right to free exercise of religion as specified in Section C, below. Teachers and other adults in the classroom must be careful to be neutral in classroom programs and activities that they plan. Classroom teachers who have questions about the suitability of materials or activities related to a holiday centered activity, including materials and activities proposed by parents or other volunteers, should consult with the principal for guidance.
5. As specified in policy 3510, Religious-Based Exemptions from School Programs, school personnel will give careful consideration to written requests from parents that students be excused from assignments or activities that the parents deem objectionable on religious grounds. If such a request is approved, an alternative activity will be provided for the student.
6. School administrators should be sensitive to the possible effects of religious holidays on school attendance when planning school activity calendars. To the extent practicable, examinations and other major events will not be scheduled on such holidays.

C. Students' Right to the Free Exercise of Religion

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the free exercise rights of students. School employees must be sensitive to the religious beliefs of students when implementing board policies and school system regulations. School administrators shall maintain neutrality with regard to religion and shall

not promote or criticize the religious beliefs or practices of students.

While on school property or involved in a school activity, students may voluntarily engage in the student-initiated religious activities as described in this subsection. However, a student may be prohibited from engaging in any such activity that would interfere with the duty of school officials (a) to maintain order and discipline, (b) to prevent disruption of the educational process, and (c) to determine educational curriculum and assignments. School officials also may prohibit student activities that (a) harass other persons or coerce other students to participate in the activity; or (b) otherwise infringe on the rights of other persons.

1. Students may read religious material and pray, either silently or audibly and alone or with other students, to the same extent and under the same circumstances as students are permitted to silently or audibly read, reflect, meditate, or speak on nonreligious matters alone or with other students in school.
2. Students may express, speak to, or attempt to share religious viewpoints in school to the same extent and under the same circumstances as students are permitted to express, speak to, or attempt to share viewpoints on nonreligious topics.
3. Students may express beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written or oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of the submission. Homework and classroom assignments will be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the board or teacher. A student will not be penalized or rewarded based on the religious views expressed in the student's work.
4. Subject to the requirements of policy 5210, Distribution and Display of Non-School Material, students may possess or distribute religious literature in school to the same extent and under the same circumstances, including any reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, as students are permitted to possess or distribute literature on nonreligious topics.
5. Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs, or religious gatherings before, during, or after school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student groups and activities. Student religious groups will be provided the same access to school facilities for assembling as other non-curricular groups and will be permitted to advertise or announce meetings to the same extent as other non-curricular groups. Principals shall arrange for adequate supervision, if needed, of activities occurring on school grounds. The school or school system may disclaim school sponsorship of non-curricular groups and events in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to

engage in prayer or religious speech.

D. School Employees and Religious Activity

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the free exercise rights of school employees. However, teachers, administrators, and other school employees are not permitted to lead, direct, or encourage any religious or antireligious activity in violation of the First Amendment of the Constitution.

When acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, teachers, school administrators, and other school employees are prohibited by the Establishment Clause from encouraging or discouraging prayer, and from actively 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 or staff, not students, for prayer or Bible study to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, employees may participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies and other events. Employees may also carry or wear religious symbols when on duty, so long as it does not interfere with their work.

Employees are encouraged to seek guidance from their principal or supervisor on any questions they may have regarding appropriate conduct under this policy.

E. Maintaining School System Neutrality in Religious Matters

1. The school system and school employees acting in their official capacities shall not promote, conduct, sponsor, or endorse any form of religious indoctrination or exercise, including prayer, at school functions. This includes graduation ceremonies. The school system and its employees shall not coerce students or employees to participate in religious activities on or off school grounds. A moment of silence may be observed at school-controlled functions, activities, or events.
2. Schools may not sponsor or conduct baccalaureate services. Parents, students, and other groups may organize and conduct voluntary baccalaureate services. Notice of any such services may be allowed in the same manner as allowed for other community activities under policy 5210, Distribution and Display of Non-School Material. School facilities must be available for use by outside groups holding baccalaureate services to the same extent as such facilities are available for use by other community groups for community activities and as specified in policy 5030, Community Use of Facilities.

II. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If a student or the student's parent believes that the student's right to religious freedom, as described in this regulation or otherwise established by law, has been violated, the student or parent may file a grievance in accordance with policy 1740/4010, Student and Parent Grievance Procedure.

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