

(School District or ISD)
RELIGIOUS/PATRIOTIC CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES
(Policy/Guidelines – SAMPLE)

Decisions of the United States Supreme Court have made it clear that it is not the province of a public school to advance or inhibit religious beliefs or practices. Under the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution, this remains the inviolate province of the individual and the church of his/her choice. The rights of any minority, no matter how small, must be protected. No matter how well intended, either official or unofficial sponsorship of religiously-oriented activities by the school are offensive to some and tend to supplant activities which should be the exclusive province of individual religious groups, churches, private organizations, or the family.

District staff members shall not use prayer, religious readings, or religious symbols as a devotional exercise or in an act of worship or celebration. The District shall not function as a disseminating agent for any person or outside agency for any religious or anti-religious document, book, or article. Distribution of such materials on District property by any party shall be in accordance with District policy with regards to use of District facilities and relations with special interest groups.

Observance of religious holidays through devotional exercises or acts of worship is also prohibited. Acknowledgement of, explanation of, and teaching about religious holidays of various religions is encouraged. Celebration activities involving nonreligious decorations and use of secular works are permitted, but it is the responsibility of all faculty members to ensure that such activities are strictly voluntary, do not place an atmosphere of social compulsion or ostracism on minority groups or individuals, and do not interfere with the regular school program.

The Board shall not conduct or sanction a baccalaureate service in conjunction with graduation ceremonies.

The Board shall not include religious invocations, benedictions, or formal prayer at any school-sponsored event.

The flag of the United States shall be raised above each school and/or at other appropriate places during all school sessions, weather permitting. The flag shall be raised before the opening of school and taken down at its close every day.

Professional staff members are authorized to lead students in the Pledge of Allegiance at an appropriate time each school day. However, no student shall be compelled to participate in the reciting of the Pledge. The Superintendent shall develop administrative guidelines which ensure that any staff member who conducts this activity does it at an appropriate time, in an appropriate manner, and with due regard to the need to protect the rights and the privacy of a nonparticipating student.

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES/CEREMONIES

A great deal of professional judgment is needed to ensure that District policy complies with constitutional and legal safeguards for the practice of religion. A major guideline to follow is a four-part test. Each activity which may appear to be of a religious nature or use materials, rituals, or symbols which may be otherwise associated with a religion must meet all four (4) of the following conditions:

- A. Does it serve the educational purpose and goals of the District?
- B. Is the purpose of the activity secular?
- C. Will its effect neither advance nor inhibit a religion?
- D. Will it avoid excessive entanglements between the school and a religion?

This guideline applies to any and all activities and programs at all levels, particularly those that take place at traditional holiday seasons such as Christmas and Easter.

Prior to planning or conducting an activity, it would be well to review the District's policies dealing with religious matters. If a teacher has any question about the propriety of the activity, she/he should consult with the principal prior to making a decision.

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN THE DISTRICT

The following guidelines apply to religious practices in the District and are drawn directly from the "Statement of Principles" issued by the U.S. Department of Education.

Student Prayer and Religious Instruction

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment does not prohibit purely private religious speech by students. Students have the same right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day as they do to engage in other comparable activity. For example, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray before tests to the same extent they may engage in comparable non-disruptive activities. Local school authorities possess substantial discretion to impose rules of order and other pedagogical restrictions on student activities, but they may not structure or administer such rules to discriminate against religious activity or speech.

Generally, students may pray in a non-disruptive manner when not engaged in school activities or instructions and subject to the rules that normally pertain in the applicable setting. Specifically, students in informal settings, such as cafeterias or hallways, may pray and discuss their religious views with each other, subject to the same rules of order as apply to other student activities and speech. Students may also speak to, and attempt to persuade, their peers about religious topics just as they do with regard to political topics. School officials, however, should intercede to stop student speech that constitutes harassment aimed at a student group or a group of students.

Students may also participate in before or after school events with religious content, such as "see you at the flagpole" gatherings, on the same terms as they may participate in other non-curriculum activities on school premises. School officials may neither discourage nor encourage participation in such an event.

The right to engage in voluntary prayer or religious discussion free from discrimination does not include the right to have a captive audience listen or to compel other students to participate. Teachers and school administrators should ensure that no student is in any way coerced to participate in religious activity.

Graduation Prayer and Baccalaureates

Under current Supreme Court decisions, school officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation nor organize religious baccalaureate ceremonies. If a school generally opens its facilities to private groups, it must make its facilities available on the same terms to organizers of privately sponsored religious baccalaureate services. A school may not extend preferential treatment to baccalaureate ceremonies and may in some instances be obliged to disclaim official endorsement of such ceremonies.

Official Neutrality Regarding Religious Activity

Teachers and school administrators, when acting in those capacities, are representatives of the State and are prohibited by the establishment clause from soliciting or encouraging religious activity and from participating in such activity with students. Teachers and administrators also are prohibited from discouraging activity because of its religious content and from soliciting or encouraging anti-religious activity.

Teaching About Religion

Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture) as literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries all are permissible public school subjects.

Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies. Although public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, and may celebrate the secular aspects of holidays, schools may not observe holidays as religious events or promote such observance by students.

Student Assignments

Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school.

Religious Literature

Students have a right to distribute religious literature to their schoolmates on the same terms as they are permitted to distribute other literature that is unrelated to school curriculum or activities. Schools may impose the same reasonable time, place, and manner or other constitutional restrictions on distribution of religious literature as they do on non-school literature generally, but they may not single out religious literature for special regulation.

Religious Excusals

Subject to applicable State laws, schools enjoy substantial discretion to excuse individual students from lessons that are objectionable to the student or the student's parents on religious or other conscientious grounds. School officials may neither encourage nor discourage students from availing themselves of an excusal option. Under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, if it is proved that particular lessons substantially burden a student's free exercise of religion and if the school cannot prove a compelling interest in requiring attendance, the school would be legally required to excuse the student.

Released Time

Subject to applicable State laws, schools have the discretion to dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction, provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation or penalize those who do not attend. Schools may not allow religious instruction by outsiders on school premises during the school day.

Teaching Values

Although schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they may play an active role with respect to teaching civic values and virtue, and the moral code that holds us together as a community. The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.

Student Garb

Students may display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent they are permitted to display other comparable messages. Religious messages may not be singled out for suppression, but

rather are subject to the same rules as are generally applied to comparable messages. When wearing particular attire, such as yarmulkes and head scarves, during the school day as part of students' religious practice, under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, schools generally may not prohibit the wearing of such items.

CARE, CUSTODY, AND DISPLAY OF THE UNITED STATES FLAG

The following rules and customs will be observed concerning the care, custody, and display of the flag of the United States of America:

- A. The flag should be displayed in or near every school building in the District during each day school is in session.
- B. The flag should be displayed every day in or near the School District's administration or central office.
- C. The flag should be displayed only from sunrise to sunset when it is displayed on a building or on a stationary flagstaff in the open. The flag may be displayed twenty-four (24) hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.
- D. The flag should **not** be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all weather flag is displayed.
- E. When the flag is carried in a procession with other flags, it should be on the flag's own right. If it is a line of flags, it should be in front of the center of the line.
- F. The flag should **not** be draped over the hood, top, sides, or back of a vehicle.
- G. When the flag is displayed with another flag against the wall from crossed staffs, it should be on the flag's own right and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag.
- H. When the flag is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally or at an angle from the windowsill, balcony, or front of a building, the union of the flag should be placed at the peak of the staff.
- I. When the flag is displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right.
- J. When the flag is used on a speaker's platform, it should be displayed flat on the wall and above and behind the speaker.
- K. When the flag is displayed from a staff in the auditorium, the staff should be displayed in the position of honor at the speaker's right as she/he faces the audience. Any other flag should be displayed to the left of the speaker.
- L. The flag shall be flown at half-staff as follows:
 - From the day of death and
 1. for thirty (30) days for the President or a former President
 2. for ten (10) days for the Vice President, the Chief Justice or a retired Chief Justice of the United States, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives
 3. until interment for an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, a Secretary of an executive or military department, a former Vice President, and the Governor of a State
 4. on the day of death and the following day for a member of Congress
 5. by order of the President
 6. by order of the Governor of MichiganOn Memorial Day until noon, and then it is to be raised to the top of the staff.
When a flag is flown at half-staff, it is to be positioned at one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff.
- M. The flag should **not** be dipped to any person or thing.
- N. The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.
- O. The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.
- P. The flag should always be carried aloft and free.
- Q. The flag should never be fastened, displayed, used, or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way.
- R. The flag should never be used as a covering for a ceiling.

S. The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.

T. The flag, when it is in such a condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

U. The flag should be folded as follows when being stored:

1. Straighten out the flag to full length and fold lengthwise once.
2. Fold it lengthwise a second time to meet the open edge, making sure that the union of stars on the blue field remains outward in full view.
3. A triangular fold is then started by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.
4. The outer point is then turned inward parallel with the open edge to form a second triangle.
5. This diagonal or triangular folding is continued toward the blue union until the end is reached with only the blue showing and the form being that of a cocked hat.