

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Religious instruction is a private concern; therefore, district schools must remain neutral regarding religion. District staff should foster respect for each individual's convictions about religion and an understanding and respect for all religions in general. Religious heritage and belief or non-belief is a critical component of human experience, past and present.

The district supports the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, and the arts in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively. The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature, and history should only be as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas.

When studying religious topics in the classrooms, it is important to uphold the dignity and belonging of all students. Factual and objective teaching about religion is to be distinguished from the teaching of religion. For example, religion is often a factor to be considered in history, art, literature, or music. District staff members may speak of religious holidays but may not advocate the religious observance, or non-observance, of such holidays in the school.

Reading of religious texts for historical or literary instructional purposes is encouraged; however, reading of religious texts may not be used for devotional purposes or to influence religious beliefs. The study of these texts or topics shall be done in a method and manner neutral toward any religion, to religion in general, or to no religion, and must relate to secular learning standards. District staff members cannot legally require recitations of prayers in classes. The use of religious symbols as part of this study is permissible if they are used as a teaching aid based on required learning standards; classroom display of religious symbols should not exceed the duration of the respective lesson or unit of study.

Religious music as part of a secular program or concert shall be permitted, so long as a particular religious belief is not favored or promoted above others; care should be taken to ensure a balanced multicultural representation of music selection for study and performance. School choruses, bands, orchestra, etc., may accept invitations to perform at non-school religious functions only on the condition that any member of the group may be excused at their request without penalty.

STUDENT SPEECH AND DRESS

Students have the right to speak about religious topics, just as they do with regard to political topics, as described in IB-AP: Freedom of Expression.

Religious speech that constitutes harassment as described in AC-BP: Nondiscrimination and/or ACB-BP: Every Student Belongs; that is aimed at an individual or group of people is not protected speech under this regulation. Students who experience harassment as a result of exercising their right to speak about religious topics may report this to a district staff member, with the Bias Incident Reporting form, or Complaint Reporting form.

Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not disruptive to the educational process, as described in JFCA-AP: Student Code of Dress.

EXCUSED ABSENCE AND/OR NON-PARTICIPATION BASED ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The district recognizes its responsibility to provide reasonable accommodation for students' religious observance. Parent/guardian requests for accommodations should be directed to the student's teacher and/or principal. Release time for participation in religious instruction is granted as provided by Oregon Revised Statutes. For secondary students released for a class period, as opposed to a full day absence, under this permission, schools will code the absence as excused in the student information system.

A student may decline to participate in non-instructional school activities that are contrary to their religious beliefs, such as the Pledge of Allegiance. However, there is no expectation that students will be shielded during school activities from exposure to

ideas that conflict with their religious beliefs. Parents and guardians may opt their student out of activities that are contrary to their religious beliefs, in accordance with OAR 581.021.0009.

Students may occasionally miss a state-required program or learning activity because of religious beliefs, when excused by a parent/guardian. For example, a parent/guardian may request that a student be excused from school to observe a religious holiday that occurs on a regular school day. In such situations the student shall not be penalized for the absence. A student who is excused must still fulfill their academic requirement and will be provided opportunities to make up any missed work, assignment, or test for absences due to religious accommodation.

The district will make reasonable efforts to develop the school calendar and plan major instructional activities to avoid major religious holidays when possible. This effort will include procedures for identifying major cultural or religious holidays with community input, which will be communicated to staff for planning purposes.

A student may, of their own violation, engage in private, non-disruptive prayer at any time not in conflict with learning activities. District staff shall neither encourage nor discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive prayer or devotional activity.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES, COMMENCEMENT, AND BACCALAUREATE

Religious services or programs shall not be conducted in district facilities during school hours or in connection to school-sponsored or related activities. Religious organizations wishing to use district facilities will follow the procedures outlined in DFD-AR: Facility Rental and Usage, KG-AR: Community Use of District Facilities and KGA-AR: Facility Use Procedure.

Promotion and commencement / graduation ceremonies shall be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions, exempting culturally-specific events in which invocations are embedded within the cultural event. The school or program must make reasonable efforts to preview student or guest speakers' messages in advance of the event and ensure their subject matter and purpose align with district policies and regulations.

Baccalaureate services shall not be organized by school staff or sponsored by district schools. A community group may hold a baccalaureate service on district property or in a district facility only when they follow district facility use procedures.

RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS AND DECORATIONS

Religious celebrations and use of religious symbols are personal and private decisions; therefore, district schools must remain neutral regarding religious celebrations. District staff should foster a respect for each individual's convictions about religion and an understanding and respect for all religions celebrations and symbols in general.

Seasonal holiday displays are permitted, including religious symbols as part of an educational role of increasing student's knowledge of culture, heritage, and diversity. Care must be taken so that the school is not seen to be advancing or inhibiting a particular religion, or religion in general, as the primary purpose of the display. Care must be taken with regards to written material accompany to holiday displays. The message may not overtly promote or favor a particular religion.

Religious holiday displays should play the educational role of increasing a student's knowledge regarding our cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage and diversity. Therefore, religious holiday displays should be more inclusive than exclusive.

END OF REGULATION

REVIEWED: 3/1/2004, 6/15/2009, 1/4/2010, 10/10/2023, 5/14/2024
ADOPTED: 3/1/2004, 6/15/2009, 1/4/2010, 5/14/2024

POLICY / REGULATION CROSS REFERENCE

ACB-AR: Bias Incident Complaint Procedure
ACB-BP: Every Student Belongs
AC-AP: Non-Discrimination
AC-AR: Discrimination Complaint Procedure
DFD-AR: Facility Rental & Usage
IB-AP: Freedom of Expression
JED-BP: Student Absences and Excuses
JFCA-AP: Student Code of Dress
JFCF-BP: Hazing, Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, Menacing,
Cyberbullying, Teen Dating Violence or Domestic Violence - Student
KG-AR: Community Use of District Facilities
KGA-AR: Facility Use Procedure
KL-BP: Public Complaints

LEGAL REFERENCE

ORS 332.107
ORS 336.035
OAR 581.021.0009

- U.S. Const. amend. I.
- OR. CONST., art I.
- Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist., 142 S. Ct. 2407 (2022)