

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

Two of the great principles of our nation and state are the freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. In recognition of these principles, we believe our schools should be a place where students with different religious beliefs and non-beliefs can come together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

The Issaquah School District recognizes that religious instruction is a private concern. The public schools are precluded from religious instruction by the Constitution as interpreted by decisions of the United States Supreme Court. Ordinarily, the will of the majority governs in a democratic society; however, neither individuals nor groups may interfere with the constitutionally protected right of every individual to freedom of religion. The resources which are contributed by the community at large and placed under the district's stewardship for operating the school district may not be used to aid or oppose any religion or religions.

The schools can be a unifying force, emphasizing the common heritage of all and serving all students. While the historical and cultural contributions of religions may be appropriate areas of study, no student who attends the Issaquah School District shall intentionally be placed in a position with respect to religious matters, where he or she must choose between what is taught in the home and/or in the place of worship and what is taught in the public schools.

The Superintendent shall establish procedures governing the application of this policy to Issaquah students, staff and programs in the matters listed below. Subsequent modification of the procedures shall also be subject to Board approval.

A. Instruction Concerning Religion

The Issaquah School District recognizes that one of its educational goals is to advance student knowledge and appreciation of the role that our religious heritage has played and continues to play in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

1. The teaching about, and not of, religion may be permitted, but only in a factual, objective, non-devotional, and respectful manner.
2. The inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, history, art and comparative religion is permitted in the curriculum and in school activities provided such inclusion or study has secular educational purpose and the religious materials are presented objectively and in a non-devotional manner.
3. Instructional emphasis on religious themes in the arts, music, literature, and history should be only as extensive as necessary for a comprehensive study of these areas. Such studies should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs.
4. Students' rights regarding student-initiated expressions in response to questions or assignments which reflect their religious beliefs or non-beliefs shall be accommodated.
5. Classroom discussions on a religious topic need to be guided in such a way that the student's right to privacy regarding religious beliefs or non-beliefs is protected. A student will not be required to declare a religious preference.

B. Prayer and Devotional Activities

1. Students shall not be required under any circumstances to recite prayers composed for the students by the state, the school district, the school, or by other students.

2. Staff members may not lead students in prayer, religious recitation, scriptural reading, or other types of devotional activities in the classroom, homeroom, assemblies, or other school-sponsored activities.
3. Students may not be appointed, requested, or allowed to volunteer to lead prayers or other devotional activities in the classroom, homeroom, or assemblies during the school day.
4. Each student's individual right to pray either silently or out loud without materially or substantially disrupting normal instructional processes shall not be abridged.

C. Dedications, Commencements, Baccalaureate Services

1. Dedication: A non-devotional dedication ceremony may recognize individuals as well as the community and be appropriate to those who use the facility. An open invitation should be extended to all citizens to participate in the ceremony.
2. Commencement: Commencement ceremonies will not include devotional activities, i.e., invocations and benedictions.
3. Baccalaureate Services: The school district shall not sponsor a baccalaureate service. Interested students and their families may plan and organize baccalaureate exercises which are religious in nature, subject to the guidelines listed in the procedures section.

D. School and Student Assemblies

All assemblies conducted during the school day are under the control of the school district. Such assemblies shall not inhibit or advance a religious belief or non-belief. A school may sponsor an assembly that may secondarily deal with a religious topic provided any such presentation of a religious topic has a secular educational purpose and is made in a balanced, objective, and non-devotional manner. Individuals are prohibited from making presentations with the purpose to convey a religious belief or non-belief and will be so informed.

E. Religious Holidays

1. Holidays throughout the year which have both religious and secular basis may be acknowledged in the public schools, and the historical and contemporary values and the origins of religious holidays may be explained in an unbiased, objective and non-devotional manner without sectarian indoctrination, control or influence.
2. Special music and drama programs performed by students before audiences shall be based upon the objective study of that particular subject or otherwise be an integral part of the instructional program. Such programs may include elements or symbols of a religious origin and/or significance, but shall be presented in an objective, balanced, and non-devotional manner and shall not have an undue emphasis or singular stress which gives the appearance of promoting any religion or celebrating any religiously based holiday. Teachers should minimize situations which require a student to choose non-participation in musical activities due to their religious beliefs or non-beliefs.
3. The use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, creche, star, angel, ichthus, or other symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided such symbols are used only as necessary for the instructional unit and not for purposes of decoration or display.
4. Christmas trees may be displayed in the classroom and in common areas, subject to review by the building administrator for compliance with this policy under the conditions listed in the procedures section.

5. The right of parents to determine when their children shall be absent from school because of religious observances shall not be limited by school authorities. See further details in the procedures section.
6. For purposes of this subsection the district calendar for students shall be prepared so as to be sensitive to conflicts with known religious holidays. Except in unusual circumstances, the district will not schedule standardized tests or examination periods in conflict with known holidays. Teachers will avoid scheduling other tests or field trips which are integral to the curriculum on known religious holidays.

F. Released Time Religious Instruction

Students may be released from school for one hour per week during non-instructional times for religious education held off school property without further school district involvement, upon a written request of their parents. Building administrators will identify and verify those times during the school day which are non-instructional.

G. Distribution of Religious Literature

1. A student may distribute religious literature under the same conditions that other non-curricular literature may be distributed on the campus, provided that such distribution does not materially and substantially disrupt the operation of the school.
2. Non-students may not distribute literature on school grounds during the school day or at school-sponsored assemblies and activities. The school day is defined as the period beginning 30 minutes before the first regularly scheduled class and ending 30 minutes after the end of the last regularly scheduled class.

H. Rent and Utilization of School Facilities by Religious Groups

Religious groups may rent and utilize school facilities under conditions prescribed by board policy. Activities of such groups should be clearly separated from school-sponsored activities so that the district does not support, or appear to support, the practice of religion.

I. Organized Gift Exchanges

Organized gift exchanges in the observance and/or celebration of religious holidays are prohibited as part of a school activity.

J. Right to Decline Participation

The right of parents to determine when their children may decline to participate in school activities which are a regular part of the curriculum, but are offensive to their religious beliefs, shall not be limited by school authorities. Students, who as a consequence choose not to participate, shall not be penalized or subjected to pressure to choose between participation in such activities and their religious beliefs.

References:

RCW 28A.02.040
RCW 28A.150.050
RCW 28A.320.510

U.S. Constitution

WA Constitution

First Amendment
Fourteenth Amendment
Article 9, Section 4
Article 26

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Issaquah School District

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