



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

Religious Curricula Content and Activities in Public Schools

CUR-A002

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1. Salem-Keizer Public Schools believes all students deserve access to inclusive, safe, and welcoming schools. We also recognize that views and opinions regarding the relationship of the schools and religion are diverse. Community opinions are important in shaping policy. The district must, however, give primary weight to the United States Constitution and Oregon State Constitution, state laws, and the decisions made by the respective courts when establishing guidelines for making decisions regarding religious-related activities and practices. The Establishment Clause within the Bill of Rights prohibits a government entity, including public schools, from creating any law or rule that favors one religion, or none. The right to practice religion, or no religion at all, is among the most fundamental of freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

Student Speech

2. Students have the right to speak about religious topics, just as they do with regard to political topics (INS-A029).
 - 2.1. Students who experience harassment as a result of exercising their right to speak about religious topics may report this to their school administrator or other school staff.
 - 2.2. Religious speech that constitutes harassment aimed at an individual or a group of people is not protected speech under this policy.
 - 2.2.1. Harassment is defined in INS-M001 as "any act that substantially interferes with a person's educational opportunities or performance, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation or at any official school bus stop; and that has the effect of knowingly placing a person in reasonable fear of physical harm or reasonable fear that damage may occur to the person's property; or creates a hostile educational environment which serves to distress, threaten, demean, annoy or torment another person."

Instruction

3. Instruction that includes religious content and/or using religious materials shall be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional¹ manner and shall serve a secular² educational purpose.
 - 3.1. Instructional materials must be selected following the criteria established in policies CUR-A001, CUR-P001, and CUR-P003.
 - 3.2. Social studies, sociology, literature, the arts, and other disciplines taught in school may include a religious dimension.
 - 3.2.1. Study of these disciplines, including the religious dimension, shall give neither preferential nor disparaging treatment to any single religion, to religion in general, or to no religion and must not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes.
 - 3.2.2. The use of religious symbols as a part of this study is permissible if they are used as symbols of religious heritage or a teaching resource.

¹ Devotional means any speech or activity that is an expression or exercise of personal faith.

² Secular means attitudes, activities, or speech that have no religious or spiritual basis.

- 3.2.2.1. These symbols may be displayed as part of an instructional sequence based on district standards maps.
 - 3.2.2.2. The display should serve primarily as a teaching aid or resource and be limited to a period not to exceed the duration of the respective lesson or unit of study.
 - 3.3. Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion shall seek the same neutrality, objectivity, and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum.
 - 3.4. Materials and activities should be sensitive to the United States' multicultural and pluralistic society and must educate rather than indoctrinate.
 - 3.5. Students are not precluded from expressing their religious beliefs or opinions in any and all classwork, including compositions, reports, music, art, debate, classroom discussion, evaluations or tests, when relevant and appropriate to the assignment.
4. All instructional materials including a religious dimension, including music, art, literature, historical sources, and/or activities must relate to a secular student learning goal or standard.
5. Musical, artistic, and dramatic presentations which have a religious theme may be included in course work and programs on the basis of their particular artistic and educational value or traditional secular usage.
 - 5.1. Musical, artistic, and dramatic content will be presented in a neutral, non-devotional manner, be related to the objective of the instructional program, and be accompanied by comparable artistic works of a nonreligious nature.
 - 5.1.1. Musical, artistic, and dramatic presentations may be enhanced through performance in specially designed environments, such as a performance hall or choral chamber. When seeking locations for music, art, and drama performances staff must follow the criteria set forth in INS-P033.
 - 5.1.2. If performing music, art, or drama in a spiritually aligned facility, staff must notify their supervisor and inform students and parents that participation in the performance is optional. Students may not be penalized for non-participation.
6. Learning tasks specific to holidays that include both religious and secular celebratory aspects (e.g., Christmas) may acknowledge the religious aspect so long as the acknowledgement is non-devotional and so long as students are not required to reveal, analyze, or critique their religious beliefs, including no belief.
 - 6.1. Individual students are allowed, at their own direction, to use religious personages, events, or symbols as a vehicle for artistic expression, if relevant and appropriate to the assignment.
7. Staff will not engage in the following activities related to student learning:
 - 7.1. Require that students reveal, analyze, or critique their religious beliefs, including no belief;
 - 7.2. Grade academic work on its religious expression, if any;
 - 7.3. Censor or impose consequences on students who engage in religious expression in accordance with the law; or,
 - 7.4. Impose the religious beliefs, or absence of religious beliefs, of the staff member on students.
8. A student may decline to participate in a non-instructional school activity that is contrary to their religious convictions, such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance; however, there is no expectation



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY
Religious Curricula Content and Activities in Public
Schools
CUR-A002

that students will be shielded from exposure to ideas that conflict with their religious beliefs. Inevitably, students will read literature, learn about concepts, and interact with peers of differing belief systems.

- 8.1. Parents, guardians, and caregivers with educational rights may opt their student out of school activities that are contrary to their religious convictions following the criteria outlined in OAR 581.021.0009 and QAM CUR-P007.

Schoolwide Celebrations & Decorations

9. Schoolwide celebrations and decorations must be secular in nature and not promote a specific religion.
 - 9.1. Refer to RSK-W008 for guidelines about the use of holiday decorations in district facilities.
 - 9.2. This restriction does not prohibit individual students, at their own direction, from expressing their religious celebrations in dress, speech, writing, or other representations.

Prayer

10. As a matter of individual liberty, a student may of their own volition engage in private, non-disruptive prayer at any time not in conflict with learning activities.
 - 10.1. School staff shall neither encourage nor discourage a student from engaging in non-disruptive oral or silent prayer or any other form of devotional activity.

Equal Access Act of 1984

11. If non-curriculum related student groups are permitted to meet on school premises immediately before or after school hours, students shall be permitted to meet to discuss religious, political, philosophical, or other issues, provided such group meetings are student-initiated and student-managed.
12. Religious groups may rent school facilities under the policy providing for facilities rentals (FAC-P011). Activities of such groups shall be clearly separated from school-sponsored activities so that the school district does not support or appear to support the establishment of religion.

Religious Symbols

13. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process as outlined in policy INS-A025.

Excusals for Religious Reasons

14. A student, upon the request of a parent, guardian, or caregiver with educational rights, may be excused to participate in religious instruction for a portion of a school day or school week, provided the activity is not conducted on school property. In accordance with ORS 339.420, elementary school students may be excused for up to two (2) hours per week and secondary students may be excused for up to five (5) hours per week.
 - 14.1. Course credit shall not be granted for such instruction.
 - 14.2. At the secondary level, students may be released from one or more class periods to participate in religious instruction upon the request of a parent, guardian, or caregiver with educational rights. Schools will code this period or absence as RELEASE in Synergy and shall not use other codes.



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY
Religious Curricula Content and Activities in Public
Schools
CUR-A002

15. Upon receipt of a request from a parent, guardian, or caregiver with educational rights, a student shall be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.
- 15.1. Students who are excused from class or school day as a religious accommodation must have an opportunity to make up any work, assignment, or test missed as a result of the absence.

Excusals for Cultural Reasons

16. A student, upon the request of a parent, guardian, or caregiver with educational rights, may be excused to participate in cultural observances for a portion of a school day or school week, provided the activity is not conducted on school property.
- 16.1. Course credit shall not be granted for such observances.
17. Upon receipt of a request from a parent, guardian, or caregiver with educational rights, a student shall be excused from attending school in observance of a cultural holiday.
- 17.1. Students who are excused from class or school day as a cultural accommodation must have an opportunity to make up any work, assignment, or test missed as a result of the absence.

Promotion, Commencement, & Baccalaureate Services

18. There shall be no school sponsorship of baccalaureate services. Interested parents, guardians, caregivers, and students may plan and organize baccalaureate exercises, provided that the service is not promoted through the school and that staff and student participation is voluntary.
19. Promotion and commencement exercises shall be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.
- 19.1. Culturally specific events in which invocations are embedded within the cultural event are exempted.
- 19.2. The school or program must make a reasonable effort to preview student and guest speakers' messages in advance of the event and ensure their subject matter, content, or purpose align with district policies.

Distribution of Religious Literature

20. A student may distribute religious literature under the same conditions that other literature may be distributed on the campus, provided that such distribution does not intrude on the operation of the school.
- 20.1. Material and/or announcements promoting religion may not be distributed by non-students or on behalf of groups or individuals who are not students.

Religious Services

21. Religious services, programs or assemblies shall not be conducted in school facilities during school hours or in connection with any school-sponsored or school-related activity.
22. Speakers and/or programs that convey a religious or devotional message are prohibited.
- 22.1. This restriction does not preclude the presentation of choral or musical assemblies which may use religious music or literature as a part of the program or assembly as outlined in the Instruction section of this policy.

Complaints



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY
Religious Curricula Content and Activities in Public
Schools
CUR-A002

23. Students, parents, guardians, caregivers, and staff who are aggrieved by practices or activities conducted in the school or district may register their concern with the school administrator as outlined in policy ADM-P008.

Implementing Procedures:

CUR-P007-Religious Exemption Opt-out

Revision History:

Date	Description
10/07/22	New policy

Approved By: The Director of Strategic Initiatives