

1 Great Falls School District

2
3 **INSTRUCTION**

2332

4
5 Student Religious Activity at School

6
7 In keeping with the United States and Montana Constitutions and judicial decisions, Great Falls
8 Public Schools may not support religion or endorse religious activity. At the same time, the
9 District may not prohibit private religious expression by students. The purpose of this policy is to
10 provide direction to students and staff members about the application of these principles to
11 student religious activity at school.

12
13 Student Prayer and Discussion

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15 Students may pray individually or in groups and discuss their religious views with other students,
16 as long as they are not disruptive or coercive. The right to engage in voluntary prayer does not
17 include the right to have a captive audience listen to, to harass other students, or to force them to
18 participate. Students may pray quietly in the classroom, except when they are expected to be
19 involved in classroom instruction or activities.

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21 Staff Members

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23 Staff members are representatives of the District and must “navigate the narrow channel between
24 impairing intellectual inquiry and propagating a religious creed.” They may not encourage,
25 discourage, persuade, dissuade, sponsor, participate in, or discriminate against a religious activity
26 or an activity because of its religious content. They must remain officially neutral toward
27 religious expression.

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29 Graduation Ceremonies

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31 Graduation is an important event for students and their families. In order to assure the
32 appropriateness and dignity of the occasion, the District sponsors and pays for graduation
33 ceremonies and retains ultimate control over their structure and content.

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35 District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy to give prayers at graduation.
36 Furthermore, the District officials may not organize or agree to requests for prayer by other
37 persons at graduation, including requests from students. The District may not prefer the beliefs of
38 some students over the beliefs of others, coerce dissenters or nonbelievers, or communicate any
39 endorsement of religion.

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41 Baccalaureate Ceremonies

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43 Students and their families may organize baccalaureate services, at which attendance must be
44 entirely voluntary. Organizers of baccalaureate services may rent and have access to school
45 facilities on the same basis as other private groups but may not receive preferential treatment.

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1 The District may not be identified as sponsoring or endorsing baccalaureate services. District
2 funds, including paid staff time, may not be used directly or indirectly to support or subsidize
3 any religious services.

4 5 Assemblies, Extracurricular and Athletic Events

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7 District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy, staff members, or outsiders to
8 give prayers at school-sponsored assemblies and extracurricular or athletic events. District
9 officials also may not organize or agree to student requests for prayer at assemblies and other
10 school-sponsored events.

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12 Furthermore, prayer may not be broadcast over the school public address system, even if the
13 prayer is nonsectarian, non-proselytizing, and initiated by students.

14 15 Student Religious Expression and Assignments

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17 Students may express their individual religious beliefs in reports, tests, homework, and projects.
18 Staff members should judge their work by ordinary academic standards, including substance,
19 relevance, appearance, composition, and grammar. Student religious expression should neither
20 be favored nor penalized.

21 22 Religion in the Curriculum

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24 Staff members may teach students about religion in history, art, music, literature, and other
25 subjects in which religious influence has been and continues to be felt. However, staff members
26 may not teach religion or advocate religious doctrine or practice. The prohibition against
27 teaching religion extends to curricular decisions that promote religion or religious beliefs.

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29 School programs, performances, and celebrations must serve an educational purpose. The
30 inclusion of religious music, symbols, art, or writings is permitted if the religious content has an
31 historical and/or independent educational purpose which contributes to the objectives of the
32 approved curriculum. School programs, performances, and celebrations cannot promote,
33 encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, or discriminate against a religion or religious activity
34 and cannot be religious or religious-holiday oriented.

35 36 Student Religious Groups

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38 Students may gather as non-curricular groups to discuss or promote religion in accordance with
39 District Policy 3233.

40 41 Distribution of Religious Literature

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43 Students may distribute religious literature to their classmates, subject to the same
44 constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on the distribution of other non-
45 school literature. No other individuals may distribute religious or other literature to students on

1 school property, consistent with and pursuant to the District’s policy on solicitations (Policy
2 4321).

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4 Religious Holidays

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6 Staff members may teach objectively about religious holidays and about the religious symbols,
7 music, art, literature, and drama that accompany the holidays. They may celebrate the historical
8 aspects of the holidays, but may not observe them as religious events.

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10 Cross References:

11 Policy 3233 Student Use of Buildings

12 Policy 3510 School Sponsored Activities

13 Policy 3550 Student Clubs

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15 Policy History:

16 Adopted on: July 1, 2000

17 Revised on: August 23, 2021