

1 Great Falls School District

2

3 **INSTRUCTION**

2332

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5 Student Religious Activity at School

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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.

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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 may not encourage, discourage, persuade, dissuade, sponsor, participate in, or  
24 discriminate against a religious activity or an activity because of its religious content when in the  
25 course of completing official duties

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27 Graduation Ceremonies

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

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

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39 Baccalaureate Ceremonies

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41 Students and their families may organize baccalaureate services, at which attendance must be  
42 entirely voluntary. Organizers of baccalaureate services may rent and have access to school  
43 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 Legal References:

16 § 20-7-112 Sectarian Publications Prohibited and - Religious Materials Allowed - Prayer

17 Kennedy v. Bremerton 597 U.S. (2022)

18 Chapter 280 (2023) Religious Materials and Prayer in Schools

19 Chapter 281 (2023) Religious Expression for Students and Teachers

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21 Policy History:

22 Adopted on: July 1, 2000

23 Revised on: August 23, 2021

24 Revised on: August 21, 2023