

1 2332 INSTRUCTION

2 Student Religious Activity at School

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

8 **Student Prayer and Discussion**

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

14 **Staff Members**

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

19 **Graduation Ceremonies**

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

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

28 **Baccalaureate Ceremonies**

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

32 The District may not be identified as sponsoring or endorsing baccalaureate services. District funds,
33 including paid staff time, may not be used directly or indirectly to support or subsidize any religious
34 services. Assemblies, Extracurricular and Athletic Events

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

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

3 **Student Religious Expression and Assignments**

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

8 **Religion in the Curriculum**

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

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

18 **Student Religious Clubs**

19 Students may organize clubs to discuss or promote religion, subject to the same constitutionally
20 acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on other student-organized clubs.

21 **Distribution of Religious Literature**

22 Students may distribute religious literature to their classmates, subject to the same constitutionally
23 acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on the distribution of other non-school literature. Non
24 Great Falls Public School students may not distribute religious or other literature to students on school
25 property, consistent with and pursuant to the District's policy on solicitations (Policy 4321).

26 **Religious Holidays**

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

30 Policy History:

31 Adopted on: July 1, 2000

32 Revised on: