

Browning Public Schools

Policy #4220

Policy Name: *Student Religious Activity at School*

Regulation: -----

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

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

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

Graduation Ceremonies: Graduation is an important event for students and their families. In order to assure the appropriateness and dignity of the occasion, the District sponsors and pays for graduation ceremonies and retains ultimate control over their structure and content. ~~The District may not engage in practices, which communicate an endorsement of religion.~~

District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy to give prayers at graduation. Furthermore, District officials may not organize or agree to request prayer by other persons at graduation, including requests by students to open or deliver a prayer at graduation. The District may not prefer the beliefs of some students over the beliefs of others, coerce dissenters or nonbelievers, or communicate any endorsement of religion.

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

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

Assemblies, Extracurricular and Athletic Events

District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy, staff members, or outsiders to give prayers at school-sponsored assemblies and extracurricular or athletic events. District officials also may not organize or agree to student requests for prayer at assemblies and other school-sponsored events. Furthermore, prayer may not be broadcast over the school public address system, even if the prayer is nonsectarian, non-proselytizing, and initiated by students.

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

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

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

Student Religious Clubs Groups: Students may ~~organize~~ **gather as non-curricular groups** clubs to discuss or promote religion **in accordance with District Policy 3233**. ~~subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on other student organized clubs.~~

Distribution of Religious Literature: Students may distribute religious literature to their classmates, subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on the distribution of other non-school literature. Outsiders may not distribute religious or other literature to students on school property, consistent with and pursuant to the District's policy on solicitations (**policy #4321**).

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

School Sponsored Events: ~~District officials may not invite or permit members of the clergy, staff members, or outsiders to give prayers at school-sponsored assemblies and extracurricular or athletic events. District officials also may not organize or agree to student requests for prayer at assemblies and other school-sponsored events. Furthermore, prayer may not be broadcast over the school public address system, even if the prayer is nonsectarian, unrelated to attempts to convert or demonstrate religious preference, and initiated by students. However, for the purposes of this policy, traditional Blackfeet "blessings" are not considered religious prayer, but an allowable cultural practice.~~

~~Any presentation by participants in graduation ceremonies, student societies exploring and reflecting traditional Blackfeet culture, and assemblies to honor students or staff, may include ceremonial private expression of the individual participants that does not necessarily reflect any official position of the District, its Board, administration, or employees, or indicate the views of any other student participants. The Board recognizes that at graduation time, societal inductions, and student/staff recognition there will be instances when Blackfeet traditional values, ceremonial practices, and cultural expression interaction with the public schools and students. The Board, however, does not endorse religion, but recognizes the rights of individuals to have the freedom to express their individual political, social, or religious views, for this is the essence of education.~~

Cross Reference: Policy 3550 – Student Clubs
Policy 3233 - Student Use of Buildings

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Policy 3510 - School Sponsored Activities

Legal Reference: ~~Art. XI, Sec. 5, Montana Constitution – Freedom of Religion~~
~~Art. X, Sec. 1, Montana Constitution – Educational Goals and Duties~~
~~Art. X, Sec. 2, Montana Constitution – Nondiscrimination in Education~~
~~20-1-308, MCA Religious Instruction Released Time Program~~
~~20-7-112, MCA Sectarian Publications Prohibited and Prayer Permitted~~

Policy History:

Adopted on: 5/31/00
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