

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.

~~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.~~

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.

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

1 be broadcast over the school public address system, even if the prayer is nonsectarian, unrelated to
2 attempts to convert or demonstrate religious preference, and initiated by students. However, for the
3 purposes of this policy, traditional Blackfeet “blessings” are not considered religious prayer, but an
4 allowable cultural practice.

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

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

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

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24 **Student Religious Clubs:** Students may organize clubs to discuss or promote religion, subject to the
25 same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on other student-organized
26 clubs.

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28 **Distribution of Religious Literature:** Students may distribute religious literature to their
29 classmates, subject to the same constitutionally acceptable restrictions that the District imposes on
30 the distribution of other non-school literature. Outsiders may not distribute religious or other
31 literature to students on school property, consistent with and pursuant to the District’s policy on
32 solicitations.

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

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39 **Cross Reference:**

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41 **Legal Reference:** Art. XI, Sec. 5, Montana Constitution - Freedom of Religion
42 Art. X, Sec. 1, Montana Constitution - Educational Goals and Duties
43 Art. X, Sec. 2, Montana Constitution - Nondiscrimination in Education
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45 20-1-308, MCA Religious Instruction Released Time Program
46
47 20-7-112, MCA Sectarian Publications Prohibited and Prayer Permitted

48 **Policy History:**

49 Adopted on: 5/31/00
50 Reviewed on: 11/12/19
51 Amended on: 11/26/19