

## SECTION 500 – INSTRUCTION

### RELIGION

### POLICY 560

#### ARTICLE 1 RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY

- A. Schools must be religiously neutral. No school activities may occur that have the purpose or effect of promoting or inhibiting religion. Students must never be given the impression that their school officially prefers or sanctions a particular religion or religion generally. Further, students must never feel coerced by pressure from their peers or from the public to adhere to any religion. The Supreme Court has established the “Lemon test” for schools to pass constitutional muster with regard to teaching religious topics/issues in public schools:
1. Have a secular purpose;
  2. Have a primary effect which neither advances nor inhibits religion;
  3. Avoid excessive state entanglement with religion.
- B. Schools may not advocate particular religious viewpoints nor celebrate particular religious events. Schools may not sponsor religious practices, but may teach about religion. Such teaching shall comply with the “Lemon test”.
- C. Staff, when teaching or supervising students or when acting as representatives of the school or School District, may not participate in religious activities or advocate particular religious views.

#### ARTICLE 2 TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

- A. The study of religion and/or religious holidays may be included in the curriculum if the study includes educating students about history, cultures, and traditions. The study of “Holidays Around the World” that includes education about various religions is acceptable while the theme, “Christmas Around the World” stretches the boundary of acceptability.
- B. Teachers must be alert to the distinction between teaching about religion, (including religious holidays), which is permissible, and promoting a religion, (including celebration of religious holidays), which is not. Teachers may not use the study of religion or religious holidays as an opportunity to proselytize or to inject personal religious beliefs into discussions.
- C. Conflicts between the school calendar and major holy days are unavoidable. When students must be absent because of their religious holy days, care must be taken not to schedule major tests or introduce new or specific instructional concepts or activities that would be difficult to repeat or to make up. Students must be given the opportunity to make up work missed due either to celebrating or observing their major religious holy days as verified by their parents or guardians.

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#### References:

C.R.S. 22-1-120 Right of free expression  
C.R.S. 22-25-110 Exemptions from portions of health education – religious reasons  
C.R.S. 22-32-110 (k) Discrimination regarding religion  
374 U.S. 203, 1963 Teaching about religion  
393 U.S. 97, 1968 Evolution v Creationism  
393 U.S. 503, 1969 Distribution of religious materials  
403 U.S. 602, 1971 Lemon Test  
449 U.S. 987, 1980 Teaching about holidays  
484 U.S. 595, 1987 Evolution v Creationism  
911 F.2d 882 Teachers religious expression  
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#### ARTICLE 3 ASSEMBLIES, CONCERTS, CEREMONIES

- A. School concerts that present a variety of selections may include religious music. However, programs dominated by religious music, especially when they coincide with a particular religious holiday, must be avoided. When students are uncomfortable or refuse to participate in a program because of the religious content, the content is most likely inappropriate. Sacred music of any religion may not dominate music classes, instruction, programs or concerts.
- B. Teachers preparing school programs involving religious content, music or art shall meet with their School Principal to review the proposed content for educational relevancy and avoidance of promotion of any religion. If either party believes the content to be inappropriate, mutually agreed upon alternatives are to be selected.
- C. When performances or programs include material of religious origin, the following statement is to be made at the beginning:

“This program (performance) is presented for the purpose of helping students and the public become aware of, understand and appreciate human culture, history and religious diversity. By including these materials, the school or the Platte Canyon School District does not endorse any form of religious belief nor do we intend to disparage any such belief.”

#### ARTICLE 4 RELIGIOUS DEVOTIONS, WORSHIP

- A. Schools may not sponsor religious devotions, worship, practice or celebrations. Any program related to a religious holiday, (e.g. Christmas), must only be undertaken for educational purposes for all students. Programs that make students feel excluded or identified with a religion not their own are not appropriate.

#### ARTICLE 5 PRAYER

- A. Students may engage in personal silent prayer (e.g. blessing before a meal);
- B. There shall be no vocal denominational or nondenominational prayer and/or ceremonial reading from the Bible in classrooms, over intercom systems, or at school sponsored events or activities;
- C. No staff member or volunteer shall offer or recite prayers with students, in classrooms, over intercom systems, or at school sponsored events or activities;

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- D. No coach or school official shall initiate or lead a team in prayer nor allow any team member or other student to do so;
- E. No prayer may be delivered by clergy at official school assemblies or ceremonies including graduation;
- F. Staff may not pray with or in the presence of their students in school or in their capacities as teachers or representatives of the school.

#### ARTICLE 6 HOLIDAY SYMBOLS

- A. Holiday symbols must be used primarily for educational purposes and secondarily for decorative purposes. Emphasis must be placed on the cultural aspect of the symbol and not focus on religious significance. Some symbols may have no religious significance themselves, but may be associated with a particular religious belief in connection with holiday celebrations. Caution is to be exercised in displaying these symbols in a manner that promotes a religious belief.

#### ARTICLE 7 STUDENT RELIGIOUS CLUBS

- A. The Equal Access Act requires public schools to treat all student-initiated groups equally, regardless of the religious, political, or philosophical beliefs. This means that, once a school opens its facilities to student-initiated clubs, it must allow religious clubs to use those facilities.

#### ARTICLE 8 DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS MATERIALS

- A. The Supreme Court has recognized students' rights to free expression in public schools under the free speech clause of the First Amendment. However, this right is not absolute. Students have a limited right to distribute religious material inside public schools. Student religious expression may be limited if it substantially interferes with or disrupts the school's activities or if it involves coercive proselytizing. Moreover, in order to avoid violating the establishment clause, it is essential that schools neither sponsor nor appear to sponsor the distribution of religious materials by students. Administrators are to control any "coercive distribution" where distributors block students' mobility, seek to place materials in students' hands or repeatedly ask them to take materials after a "no" response has been given.

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