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Contact Person: Assistant Superintendent

POLICY 609 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

I. PURPOSE

To identify the status of religion in the curriculum and environment of Bloomington Public Schools.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. The District shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or nonbelief. Instead, the District encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for and tolerance of each other's views.
- B. The District also recognizes that religion has had and is having a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization.
- C. The District recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase its students' knowledge and appreciation of music, art, drama, and literature, which may have had a religious basis or origin as well as a secular importance.
- D. The District supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in the school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.
- E. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of the various religions, holidays, customs, and beliefs may be explained in an unbiased and nonsectarian manner.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. The superintendent shall be responsible for ensuring that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs, and holidays in the school district is in keeping with the following guidelines:
 - 1. The proposed activity must have a secular purpose.
 - 2. The primary objective of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.
 - 3. The activity must not foster excessive governmental relationships with religion.

4. Notwithstanding the foregoing guidelines, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from attendance at school for the purpose of religious instruction or observance of religious holidays.
 5. Notwithstanding the foregoing guidelines, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from a curricular activity for a religious observance. The school district must provide annual notice to parents of this policy.
- B. The superintendent is granted authority to develop and present for School Board review and approval directives and guidelines for the purpose of providing further guidance relative to the teaching of materials related to religion. Approved directives and guidelines shall be attached as an addendum to this Policy.

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REGULATION 609 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

A. Observance of Religious Holidays

When religious holidays are recognized, they should be as closely related to the curriculum as possible. The educational values should be such that they could be taught as part of the curriculum at any time during the year. Religious holidays, including their religious aspects, may be studied, and the secular aspects of the holiday may be celebrated. However, the holiday may not be observed or promoted as a religious event.

B. Religious Symbols

Definition of religious symbols: A religious symbol is any object that suggests the existence of a supreme being or universal being, deity or force. Examples of such religious symbols are the Cross, Menorah, Crescent, Star of David, signs of the zodiac, nativity scenes, Buddhist symbols, and any other symbols, which are a part of a religious celebration.

Other symbols, which may be of seasonal or geographic significance, are the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Menorah, Dreidel, Shofar, Easter eggs and Easter bunnies. Any of the aforementioned symbols may be displayed as a part of a broad cultural study and left on display for the time their presence is necessary to the study.

C. The Role of Religious Music in the School Curriculum

Musical programs prepared for or presented during school hours should not be religious or religiously oriented. Such programs, however, whether containing seasonal themes or not, may include religious music. An example of an acceptable program would include secular winter songs and holiday music from around the world, which includes religious and secular seasonal music from various lands and religions.

A volunteer group practicing outside school hours may present a program of religious music in the school outside of school hours. However, these groups would be limited by the rules governing the use of school facilities.

At all levels of education, the study of religious music as a part of a music appreciation course, musical experience, or as part of a study of various lands and cultures is appropriate as is the study of secular music.

D. Religious Expression Within the Schools

The distribution of literature, display of posters, and groupings and assemblies of students which encourage or oppose religious or non-religious thought or action shall be governed by the same rules which apply to their secular counterparts

Religious and non-religious themes and symbols may be used in independent student-initiated projects in art, shop, or other school activities such as reports and class discussions as a mode of personal expression or in an informative capacity. The instructor should exercise caution so as not to either encourage or discourage religious or non-religious themes to the advantage or disadvantage of any belief or other appropriate secular projects. Exhibition of such works shall be given prominence and duration equal to that of any comparable project.

E. The School Calendar

The school calendar should be prepared so as to minimize conflicts with the religious observances of all faiths.

F. Teaching About Religion

A distinction should be made between the teaching of religion and teaching about religion. Curriculum may use the Bible or other religious writings in classes that examine religion's influence on history, literature, arts, or music. The teaching of religion is not permitted.

G. Prayer

Formal prayer, defined as any call to prayer by a teacher or other responsible adult or a student assistant, or prayer performed at a specified time, is prohibited during the school day and at school activities.

Students have the right to engage in individual or group prayer during the school day in a non-disruptive manner and subject to the rules that normally pertain in applicable settings.

H. Moment of Silence

1. State Statute 121A.10 states, "A moment of silence may be observed."
2. Official school functions such as Commencement, or any meaningful or mournful occasion may be recognized with a "moment of silence." The moment of silence allows individuals to use it as they see fit. Some constraints accompany this practice. Anyone calling for a moment of silence should not ask participants to stand, bow or pray. Any responses to the moment of silence are left to the discretion of the individual.