

**ABERDEEN SCHOOL DISTRICT #58**

This district recognizes that students and employees have certain constitutional rights regarding religious activities. The district will not take action to prevent or deny students and employees the opportunity to exercise such rights or impose sanctions for having exercised such rights.

**STUDENT RIGHTS**

1. Prayer During Noninstructional Time. All students have the right to engage in private, non-disruptive activities, such as praying or reading religious materials, during noninstructional time. Students may engage in such activities with other students.
2. Organized Prayer Groups and Activities. Students have the right to organize prayer groups, religious clubs, and similar activities to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activity groups. The district will provide such groups the same access to school facilities for assembling and school media for advertising that it provides other non-curricular student activity groups.
3. Moment of Silence. Students have the right to pray, or not pray, during moments of silence and district employees are prohibited from encouraging or discouraging student prayer during such moments of silence.
4. Accommodation of Prayer During Instructional Time. Students have the right to be dismissed to attend off-premises religious instruction during the school day, in compliance with the district's policy governing release time. The district will evaluate and grant, or deny, student requests to be excused from class to accommodate religious needs in the same manner that similar requests to accommodate nonreligious needs are evaluated.
5. Religious Expression and Prayer in Class Assignments. Students have the right to incorporate written expressions of religious beliefs in their schoolwork, including homework, art, and other class assignments. District employees are prohibited from penalizing or rewarding students based on the religious content, or lack of religious content, in a student's schoolwork.
6. Student Speakers at Assemblies and Extracurricular Events. The district prohibits the selection of student speakers at assemblies and extracurricular activities on any basis that favors or disfavors religious speech. Student speakers, selected on the basis of genuinely neutral criteria, who retain primary control over the content of their expression, will not be sanctioned solely on the basis that the content of the speech is religious or nonreligious in nature. In the event school officials determine or substantially control the content of a student speech, it may not include a prayer or specifically religious, or anti-

religious, speech. The district will make appropriate, neutral disclaimers to clarify that such speech, regardless of content, is not endorsed by the school.

7. Non-Student Speakers at Assemblies and Extracurricular Events. The district prohibits school officials from engaging speakers whose speech includes prayer, or religious or anti-religious content.
8. Prayer at Graduation/Baccalaureate Ceremonies. The district prohibits school officials from mandating or organizing prayer at graduation or selecting speakers in a manner that favors religious speech, such as prayer. Student speakers at graduation ceremonies must comply with this district’s graduation policy. The district is prohibited from sponsoring baccalaureate ceremonies but may allow use of school facilities by private organizers of such ceremonies to the same extent, and in the same manner, as it would allow use of the facilities by other private groups.
9. Student Dress. Students may display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent that they are permitted to display other comparable messages, and so long as the items are not disruptive to the educational process.
10. Distribution of Religious Materials. Students have the right to distribute religious literature on school property, in a nondisruptive manner, on the same terms as they are permitted to distribute literature that is unrelated to school curriculum or activities, subject to the district’s reasonable restrictions as to time, place, and manner.
11. Participation in Curriculum. Students have the right to be exempted from participating in school courses, programs, or activities if it is established that such participation violates the student’s religious beliefs, and the district cannot prove a compelling interest in required attendance.

**DISTRICT EMPLOYEE RIGHTS**

The district prohibits employees from encouraging or discouraging prayer and from actively participating in such activities with students. However, employees may take part in religious activities where the overall context makes it clear that they are not participating in their official capacities (i.e., meeting with other teachers for prayer group during lunch).



**LEGAL REFERENCE:**

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Section 9524 (2001)
- Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, U.S. Department of Education (February 7, 2003)
- Religion Expression in Public Schools, U.S. Department of Education (1995)

**ADOPTED:** April 16, 2003

**AMENDED:**