

POLICY: 670. RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN THE SCHOOLS

With respect to religious expression, the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides both freedom of religion and prohibition against the establishment of religion by government. The Arrowhead School District, as a governmental agency, shall be neutral with respect to religion and shall not engage in any activity that advocates or disparages religion, religious beliefs or nonbeliefs. At the same time, the School District recognizes that students have the important right of religious expression.

The school is a place where religion and religious beliefs or non-beliefs shall be treated with fairness, respect, and neutrality. The school upholds the first amendment when it protects the religious liberty rights of students of all religious faiths, as well as students who profess no religious faith.

The District recognizes that a student's education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in history and culture. It is both proper and important for teachers to objectively discuss, within the context of the District's curriculum, the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with society, literature, or the arts.

Though the District shall be neutral with respect to religion, the District shares responsibility with the community to develop appropriate moral and ethical character incorporating the ideals of liberty, justice, the pursuit of happiness, and equality of opportunity. The fact that some of these values may also be held within a religion does not make it improper to teach them.

In addition to religious neutrality, the District subscribes to the following principles:

- A. Religious expression within the Arrowhead School District requires a careful balancing of free speech and the free exercise of religion without endorsing, promoting, or establishing religion.
- B. A school's instruction about religion shall be objective and shall not be intended to favor, promote, or demean the religious beliefs or customs of any religion.
- C. Staff shall not endorse, encourage, or solicit religious or anti-religious expression. Staff shall not prohibit or discourage any student from praying or otherwise expressing religious beliefs or non-beliefs, as long as it is not disruptive within the classroom or instructional day. When acting in their official capacity, staff members are prohibited from endorsing, soliciting, encouraging, directing, or assisting religious activities with students on campus or at school-sponsored off-campus events.
- D. Students may express their beliefs about religion in their homework, artwork, in other written and oral reports, if that expression is consistent with the curriculum assignment. Such work shall be evaluated by the regular academic standards, free of discrimination based on religious content. Accommodations shall be made if the curriculum is contrary to a student's religious belief.
- E. Students have a right to distribute religious literature to their schoolmates on the same terms as they are permitted to distribute other literature that is unrelated to school curriculum or activities. Schools may impose the same reasonable time, place, and manner to other constitutional restrictions on distribution of religious literature as they do on non-school literature generally, but they may not single out religious literature for special regulation.
- F. Students may form religious clubs, wear religious clothing, display religious messages, use school facilities on the same basis as accorded others and authorized by regulations or policy. Students may also be allowed release time for religious instruction.