

516 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to identify the status of religion and how it pertains to the programs of Stonebridge World School (SBWS).

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. SBWS shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or nonbelief. Instead, SBWS encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for the tolerance of each other's views.

B. SBWS also recognizes that religion has had and continues to have a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization. The proper role of religion in the public schools is in its educational value and not in religious endorsement or celebration. Since a primary purpose of the public schools is to teach about the world that has been and the world that is, the role that religion has played in the historical and social development of humanity is essential to the curriculum.

C. SBWS recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase it's 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. SBWS supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in school activities, provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented objectively without sectarian indoctrination.

E. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of various religions, holidays, customs, and beliefs may be explained in an unbiased sectarian manner.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

A. It shall be the responsibility of the Executive Director to ensure that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs, and holidays 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 must be made to accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from a curricular activity for a religious observance or American Indian cultural practice, observance, or ceremony. The charter school must provide an annual notice to parents of this policy

B. The Executive Director is granted authority to develop and present for the Board of Directors to review 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

IV. DEFINITIONS

A. Instructional Time: Definition. "Instructional time" means any time a student is receiving educational instruction from a teacher or working under the supervision of a teacher. Instructional time generally begins when the scheduled class period officially begins and ends when the scheduled class period officially ends.

B. Non-Instructional Time: Definition. "Non-instructional time" means any time that is not defined as "instructional time." Examples of non-instructional time include, but are not limited to, time spent in the classroom before the period officially begins or after it ends; time spent in the hallways between classes; time set aside for lunch; and time spent on the school bus.

C. Prayer: Definition. "Prayer" means the act of making a reverent petition, devotion, confession, communication, or praise to God, a god, a messenger of a god, a supernatural being, a spirit, a power, or a spiritual leader.

D. Non-Curriculum Related Student Group: Definition. A "non-curriculum-related student group" is any student group that does not directly relate to the body of courses offered by the school. A student group directly relates to a school's curriculum if the subject matter of the group is actually taught, or will soon be taught, in a regularly offered course; if the subject matter of the group concerns the body of courses as a whole; or if participation in the group results in academic credit.

E. Religion: Definition. "Religion" broadly refers to a sincerely held belief in or reverence for God, a god, a supernatural being, spirit, power, or the like; a personal or institutionalized system grounded in such belief or worship; or a set of sincerely held beliefs and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader.

F. Religious Material: Definition. "Religious material" includes but is not limited to brochures, flyers, books, literature, and any other form of recorded data that advances or disparages a particular religion, religion generally, or any religious practice.

G. Distribution: Definition. "Distribution" includes but is not limited to posting materials on school walls, leaving materials on school property where students can access them, disseminating materials to one or more students, and sending materials to one or more students by means of electronic communication.

V. STUDENT RIGHTS REGARDING RELIGION

A. Student Prayer and Religious Discussion in School

1. Non-Instructional Time

During non-instructional time, students may express and share their religious beliefs, carry religious materials (including scriptures such as the Bible, the Torah, or the Koran), read religious materials, pray aloud or silently, recite the rosary, or informally discuss religion with classmates. Students may observe American Indian cultural practices or ceremonies. Students may also speak to their peers about religious topics just as they do with regard to political topics. School officials shall not interfere with such activities, unless interference is reasonably necessary to maintain order in the school or to protect the rights of other students. School officials shall intercede to stop student speech that constitutes harassment aimed at a student or a group of students.

2. Instructional Time and Class Assignments

During instructional time, students may verbally express their ideas so long as their verbal expression is consistent with the subject matter being taught. However, students may not pray aloud during instructional time. Similarly, students may not use the classroom to deliver a religious sermon to their classmates under the guise of an oral report or assignment. These rules cannot be avoided by excusing students who object to prayer in the classroom. Similarly, the extent to which students may incorporate religion into their class assignments depends on the subject matter of the assignment. Students may write papers on religion, give oral presentations on religion, and create art with religious themes if religion is a substantively relevant topic. Teachers should consider religion to be a relevant topic when the subject matter of the assignment is broad or non-specific.

3. School Functions and School-Sponsored Events

No person (including a student, SBWS employee, School Board Member, clergy member, or rabbi) may initiate or vocalize a prayer as part of a regular school function, such as an assembly, athletic event, or pre-game ceremony. Thus,

coaches may not lead a team in prayer or call upon a team member to do so before, during, or after an athletic event.

No person (including a student, SBWS employee, Board Member, clergy member, or rabbi) may initiate or vocalize a prayer as part of a school-sponsored event, even if the prayer is nondenominational.

B. Excusing Students with Objections to Subject Matter Being Taught

1. Excusing Students from Class or Classroom Activity

On occasion, a student or parent will request that the school excuse the student from class or from participating in an activity based on religious objections to the activity or the subject matter being taught. SBWS generally has broad discretion in deciding whether to excuse a student. However, there are some occasions when SBWS must excuse a student from class or from participating in an activity. If participation in a particular activity would cause a student to violate a sincerely held religious belief, the teacher shall excuse the student from the activity. If a student is excused from an educational activity or a unit, text, or a lesson on the basis of a religious objection, the student's parent or guardian is responsible for providing alternative instruction. Before an alternative lesson is proposed, however, the objection must first be discussed with the teacher. This request must be made two weeks in advance of the beginning of a unit or use of a text, and one week in advance of a specific lesson. The alternative instruction must be of comparable rigor and meet comparable academic goals of the lesson that it replaces. The School Director must approve the alternative instructional plan before instruction begins. SBWS is not required to deliver or pay for the costs of the alternative instruction. The school may not impose an academic or other penalty upon a student merely for arranging alternative instruction, but may evaluate and assess the quality of the student's work on an academically comparable basis.

If a student is excused from an educational activity or a unit, text, or a lesson on the basis of a religious objection, the student's parent or guardian is responsible for providing alternative instruction.. Eagle Ridge Academy is not required to deliver or pay for the costs of the alternative instruction. The school may not impose an academic or other penalty upon a student merely for arranging alternative instruction but may evaluate and assess the quality of the student's work on an academically comparable basis.

2. Religious Release Time: Excusing Students from School for Religious Instruction

At the request of a parent or guardian, a student shall be excused from school for a maximum of three aggregate hours per week in order to receive religious instruction conducted by a church, association of churches, or Sunday school

association incorporated under Minnesota law. Minn. Stat. § 120.101, subd. 9(3). The religious instruction shall be conducted in a place other than a public school building, and shall not be conducted at public expense. Id. SBWS shall not encourage or discourage participation in such programs.

VI. FACULTY RIGHTS AND STONEBRIDGE WORLD SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

A. Prayer in School

SBWS employees may pray outside the presence and hearing of students during non-instructional time. SBWS employees may also privately discuss religion with other employees outside the presence and hearing of students.

B. Religious Practices and School Employees

While acting in their capacity as SBWS employees, employees may not pray aloud while in the presence of a student or discuss personal religious beliefs with a student. Similarly, employees may not read scriptures or other religious materials, silently or aloud, in the presence or hearing of a student, unless the religious material is being used as a text to teach about religion. Proselytizing or attempting to proselytize students is prohibited. Employees may not visibly wear garb that endorses religion or non-religion. Employees may not display scriptures or other religious symbols in class, unless the display is temporary and the symbol is used as a legitimate teaching aid or resource as part of a course teaching about religion. Employees may not distribute religious material that is not being used as a text to teach about religion.

C. Moment of Silence

SBWS may require teachers and students to observe a moment of silence. Minn. Stat. § 126.091. The moment of silence shall not substantially exceed one minute. SBWS employees shall not state or suggest that the moment be used for silent prayer. Students shall not be asked to perform a religious ritual, such as bowing their heads or folding their hands, during the moment of silence.

D. Teaching About Religion

The Constitution permits objective teaching about religion, as opposed to religious instruction. Any course that teaches about religion shall be devoid of denominational bias. Any course or part of a course about religion shall be taught objectively as part of a secular program of education.

1. Music Performance

Musical programs prepared or presented under school auspices should be planned with sensitivity to the views of all members of the community. Such programs should not be religious or religious-holiday oriented. Schools may include selections of religious music, both choral and instrumental, provided

they are presented in a broad concert or program setting that is not religiously oriented, such as a program that includes religious and nonreligious holiday music from various cultures and religions. Religious selections should not constitute a majority of the concert. For these purposes, religious selections, especially choral selections, are defined as having religious or religion-oriented texts, but which are used for their musical value and not because of the meaning or inference of the words used in the selections.

2. Art and Drama

The study of art or drama may include works with a religious and secular importance, provided that (a) such works are presented in an objective, nonsectarian manner, and (b) the study of such works is limited to the extent reasonably necessary for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

3. Religious Symbols

A religious symbol is any object that portrays or recognizes the existence of a supreme being or deity, or any object that is so closely associated with religion or religions or with the celebration of a religious holiday that it is looked upon by a segment of the population as being of a religious nature. Religious symbols are sacred to particular faiths. Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids in the academic study of religions. Their display in the classroom should be for temporary periods only, when appropriate for educational purposes. Religious symbols should not be displayed in offices, reception areas, or other public spaces where the display is not linked to the academic study of religions.

VII. HOLIDAY OBSERVANCES

A. Student Absence for Observance of Religious Holidays

SBWS shall accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from a curricular activity for a religious observance or for American Indian cultural practices or ceremonies, at least for a reasonable number of days. SBWS shall not penalize a student who is absent for a religious holiday or American Indian cultural practices or ceremonies. The refusal to provide a make-up exam or the lowering of a student's grades are considered penalties. Students should not be unnecessarily burdened by attendance procedures when they seek to be excused from attending school for observance of a religious holiday. Schools should develop sensitive and respectful procedures that enable students to privately identify the need to be absent, without calling undue attention to the absence. SBWS need not close the school on religious holidays in order to avoid a conflict with students' religious practices. However, as a matter of administrative convenience, SBWS may close the school in order to avoid the absence of large numbers of teachers or students.

B. Employee Absence for Observance of Religious Holidays

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act provides that employers, a term which includes school boards, must reasonably accommodate the religious observances of employees. An employer may offer an employee any reasonable accommodation, even though other available means of accommodation may be less onerous to the employee. This means that SBWS may refuse to grant paid leave to observe religious holidays, but it must allow employees to use their personal days for religiously motivated absences

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