

Religious Expression and Activities on Campus and at School Events

Bossier Parish schools educate students from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, and it is the intent of this policy to respect the Constitutional rights of all students. In order to do so, the following guidelines are established:

Definitions

The following definitions shall apply to this policy. In construing these definitions, the singular shall include the plural and the plural shall include the singular:

- a) "Club" means a noncurricular student group that is recognized by the Board and that qualifies for protection under the safe-haven provisions of the Equal Access Act (20 U.S.C. §4071(c)).
- b) "Prayer" means a communication (written or audible) with a deity, including, but not limited to, a benediction, an invocation, the Lord's Prayer, or otherwise calling upon a deity to offer guidance, assistance, or a blessing. Accordingly, "Prayer" does not include customary, polite expressions and greetings, including "God Bless You" or "Thank Heavens," or a student's religious expression responsive to a legitimate academic class assignment.
- c) "Religious Service" means a convocation for a religious purpose, including, but not limited to, baccalaureate, religious youth group meeting or event, church service, and Bible study.
- d) "Religious Title" means Benediction, Invocation, Prayer, Blessing, Inspirational Message, Sermon, Devotional Pledge, Bible Reading, Devotion or any other title that in any way relates to Prayer.
- e) "Religious Venue" means a property, facility, building, or place that is maintained and controlled by or for a religious body that is organized, in whole or in part, to sustain public worship.
- f) "School District" or "District" means the Bossier Parish School District.
- g) "School Event" means any activity or happening (i) at a School Board facility or (ii) sponsored, conducted, or supervised by a School Official acting in his or her Official Capacity. It includes, but is not limited to, a graduation, grade-promotion ceremony, award program, induction ceremony, pep rally, competition, practice,

performance, class instructional time, and a club meeting or event. However, the following activities are not a School Event:

- (1) A student religious Club meeting or event, if School employees and agents are only present at the meeting or event in a "nonparticipatory capacity," as specified in the Equal Access Act;
 - (2) An activity at a School Board facility, if (i) it is outside the presence of School District students and (ii) no School Official acts in his or her Official Capacity; and
 - (3) An activity at a School Board facility that is used by a third-party pursuant to a standard facility use agreement.
- h) "School Official" or "Official" means any member of the Board, its officers, agents, and employees but only to the extent such a person acts in his or her Official Capacity. Outside organizations that receive no support from the Board, do not receive remuneration of any kind from the Board, are not controlled by the Board, and are not given preferential treatment or access by the Board are not School Officials, (e.g. booster clubs when they satisfy these requirements).
- i) "Official Capacity" means only that conduct of employees in the performance of their official duties with the school district. A person acts in his or her "Official Capacity" when (1) performing official duties or furthering the work of the School Board or (2) acting under or with a power or authority granted by virtue of employment by or association with the School Board. However, where the only power or authority the School Official exercises is the authority to be present at a School Board facility and the School Official is not interacting with or in the presence of a student, then the School Official is not in his or her Official Capacity by virtue of subsection (i)(2).

Speech, Literature Distribution and Clothing

Students in Bossier Parish schools shall have the right to express their ideas verbally and through the distribution of literature so long as their speech does not disrupt the ordinary operation of the school. The following policies shall govern student expression:

1. Students may verbally express their ideas during class so long as their verbal expressions are consistent with the subject matter being taught.
2. Students may verbally express their ideas to other students during non-instructional time so long as their speech is not disruptive to the ordinary operation of the school and does not infringe on the rights of other students.

3. Students may distribute literature during non-instructional time so long as the distribution is not disruptive to the ordinary operation of the school and does not infringe on the rights of other students.
4. Students may wear symbols or articles of clothing which contain written or symbolic expressions so long as such symbols or clothing are not obscene and do not infringe on the rights of other students.
5. Students may Pray, discuss their faith, read the Bible or other religious texts, and invite others to participate in such student-lead activities during non-instructional time.
6. As used in this section, the term “non-instructional time” means before or after school hours, between classes, during lunch or recess times, or during such times as may be set aside for student club meetings.
7. As used in this section, the phrase “does not disrupt the ordinary operation of the school” means that the speaker is the initiator and cause of disruption. This does not mean that other students must agree with the speaker. Disruption by other students in response to the student’s expressions should not be construed to mean that the speaker is causing disruption. “Disruptive to the ordinary operation of the school” includes littering, forcing other students to listen by shouting or preventing passage, or engaging in speech activities during instructional time which are not consistent with the subject matter being taught.
8. As used in this section, the phrase “infringe on the rights of other students” means defamatory expressions against another student.

While students are free to share and promote their personal religious beliefs pursuant to federal and state law, the School District and its Officials may not endorse or sponsor religious activities in schools. For example, School Officials are not permitted to promote or endorse religion, may not participate in or cause Prayers to be offered during school or in conjunction with School Events, and may not arrange to include Prayer, whether or not such is noted in a printed program, during or in conjunction with a School Event.

If School Officials select persons to make an address during or in conjunction with a School Event, they shall do so by that selection process set forth hereinbelow.

Student Speakers at School Events

Certain students who have attained special positions of honor or distinction in Bossier schools have traditionally addressed school audiences from time to time as a tangential component of their achieved positions, such as captains of various sports

teams, student council officers, class officers, homecoming kings and queens, prom king and queens, valedictorians and salutatorians, and the like. Such students have attained their respective positions based on neutral criteria. Nothing in this policy eliminates the continuation of the practice of having these students, irrespective of the grade level, address school audiences in the normal course of their respective positions.

The School District hereby creates a limited public forum for student speakers at all school events at which a student is allowed to speak publicly. For each speaker, the District shall set a maximum time limit reasonable and appropriate to the occasion. Student speakers may introduce:

- (a) Football games;
- (b) Any other athletic events designated by the district; and
- (c) Any additional events designated by the district, which may include, without limitation, assemblies and pep rallies.

The forum shall be limited in the manner described below:

Only those students who hold one of the following positions of distinction based on neutral criteria are eligible to speak at the limited public forum: student council officers, class officers, captains of school athletic teams, homecoming/prom kings and queens, valedictorians, salutatorians, presidents of student clubs, and other students holding positions of honor as the school district may designate. Any serious disciplinary violations by a student will result in the student becoming immediately ineligible to participate in the limited public forum.

A student who wishes to participate as an introductory speaker shall submit to the principal's office during an announced period of not less than five (5) days, the student's name and proof of eligibility as described above. The announced period may be at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the preceding school year so student speakers are in place for the new year, or, if the selection process will be repeated each semester, at the beginning of each semester or at the end of the preceding semester so speakers are in place for the next semester. The names of the volunteering student speakers shall be randomly drawn until all names have been selected, and the names shall be listed in the order drawn. Each selected student will be matched chronologically to the event for which the student will be giving the introduction. Each student may speak for one (1) week at a time for all introductions of events that week, or rotate after each speaking event, or otherwise as determined by the district. The list of student speakers shall be chronologically repeated as needed, in the same order. The district may repeat the announcement selection process each semester rather than one a year.

When a student is afforded the opportunity to provide an introduction to an event, the subject of the student introductions must be related to the purpose of the event and to the purpose of marking the opening of the event, honoring the occasion, the

participants, and those in attendance, bringing the audience to order, and focusing the audience on the purpose of the event. School Officials shall present this criteria to student speakers in advance but shall not engage in prior review or approval of the content of a student's speech unless requested to do so.

The student may not include obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd or indecent speech in his or her remarks. Beyond this limitation, School Officials shall not censor the student expression and shall respect the First Amendment rights of the student speaker. If and when a student voluntarily chooses to reference or include religious viewpoints in his or her remarks, the school district shall not discriminate against the student's viewpoint and shall allow such speech on the same basis as any other viewpoint.

If the school district believes there is a need to dispel confusion over the nonsponsorship of student speech at each event in which a student will deliver an introduction, a disclaimer may be given in written or oral form such as, "The student giving the introduction for this event is a volunteering student selected on neutral criteria to introduce the event. The content of the introduction is the private expression of the student and does not reflect the endorsement, sponsorship, position or expression of the School District."

Off-Site School Events

School Events within the District may be held at off site venues when an alternative venue is available and reasonably suitable. All provisions of this Policy shall apply to School Events conducted off site. When it is reasonably necessary for a School Event to be held at a Religious Venue, the secular justification for the use of the religious venue shall be documented by the school principal as follows:

- (1) the Religious Venue's physical address;
- (2) the Religious Venue's affiliation with a house of worship or congregation, if any;
- (3) the nature of the School Event and the expected number of attendees;
- (4) why the school site is inadequate for the event;
- (5) the amount that will be paid to use this Religious Venue;
- (6) the amount typically paid to use this Religious Venue, if known;
- (7) the distance between the applicable school and the Religious Venue;
- (8) the identity of the School Officials involved in selecting the Religious Venue; and
- (9) a certification that no other, available venue that is not a Religious Venue would be reasonably suitable for this School Event.

Such information shall be documented on the applicable district facility form, verified by the signature of at least one School Official and a copy shall be transmitted to the superintendent's office or his designee for approval, maintenance and review by the public.

Should a student or employee choose not to participate in an activity at a Religious Venue, an alternative assignment shall be offered.

Promotion of Personal Religious Beliefs

Pursuant to federal and state law, school employees are not permitted to promote their personal religious beliefs to students in class or during or in conjunction with a School Event. In this regard, the following guidelines shall be in effect:

- a) School employees shall not participate in any way in a Prayer with students during or in conjunction with instructional periods or any School Event. School Officials shall not offer a Prayer, recite a Prayer alongside or with students, bow their heads, kneel, join hands or otherwise posture in a manner that is likely to be perceived as an endorsement of the Prayer. If, during a Prayer a School Official chooses to remain still and silent with hands folded, as a sign of respect, such action shall not alone constitute an endorsement.
- b) School Officials during or in conjunction with a School Event shall not solicit, encourage, or discourage students to engage in religious activity or attend a Religious Service.
- c) School Officials shall not express personal religious beliefs to students during or in conjunction with instructional time or any School Event, either through oral, written or symbolic means. Nothing herein shall prohibit a teacher from using or referencing religious literature, quotations, articles, or symbols in class, if appropriate to the course or subject and if presented objectively, as part of a secular program of education.
- d) Pursuant to prevailing court precedent, a School official is permitted to wear items of jewelry that may include symbols associated with religion.
- e) School Officials shall not solicit or invite any person to deliver or offer a Prayer during or in conjunction with any School Event.

Teaching About Religion

The inclusion of religion in the study of history, culture, literature, music, drama, and art may be essential to a full and fair presentation of the curriculum. The inclusion of religious elements is appropriate as long as the material included is intrinsic to the field of study in which it is presented and is presented objectively.

The Board's approach to teaching about religion shall be academic and not devotional. Emphasis on religious themes in the arts, music, literature, and history shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and thorough study of these areas. Such studies shall not foster any particular religious tenet nor demean any religious

beliefs but shall attempt to develop mutual respect among students and advance their knowledge and appreciation of the role that religion has played in the social, cultural, and historic development of civilization.

Music, art, drama, and literature having religious themes or bases are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs, if presented objectively and as part of the tradition of the cultural and religious heritage of a particular holiday. For instance, a music curriculum may expose students to a full array of music culture, and an instructor may select such pieces as would be useful to teach a variety of music skills. Accordingly, the selection of a piece of sacred choral music useful to teach a particular music skill such as intonation, expression, harmonization or sight reading does not offend this Policy.

Pursuant to prevailing court precedent, the School Board allows for student courses and instruction in the study of comparative religion and/or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of various aspects of civilization. For instance, the presentation and study of the Bible for its literary and historic qualities, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, is permitted by law and this Policy.

A parent or person standing in parental relation may remove the parent's child from a class or other school activity that conflicts with the parent's religious or moral beliefs, if the parent presents or delivers to the teacher a written statement authorizing the removal of the child from the class or other school activity. At the same time, a parent or person standing in parental relation is not entitled to remove the parent's child from a class or other school activity to avoid a test or to prevent the child from taking a required subject for an entire semester. This policy does not exempt a child from satisfying grade level or graduation requirements.

Student Clubs

Student clubs are a traditional and vital part of a student's educational process. These nondiscriminatory guidelines shall govern the continued operation of student-initiated clubs.

1. No school shall not deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or the content of the speech at such meetings.
2. A school is a limited open forum whenever such school grants an opportunity for one or more noncurriculum-related student groups to meet on school premises during non-instructional time.
3. Schools shall be deemed to offer a fair opportunity to students who wish to conduct a meeting within its limited open forum, if such school uniformly provides that—

- a. the meeting is voluntary and student-initiated;
 - b. there is no sponsorship of the meeting by the school, the Board, or its agents or employees;
 - c. employees or agents of the school or Board are present at religious meetings only in a nonparticipatory capacity;
 - d. the meeting does not materially and substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school; and
 - e. nonschool persons may not direct, conduct, or control the activities of student groups.
4. School Officials shall be present at student religious clubs only in a nonparticipatory capacity. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of the school or school employees to maintain order and discipline on school premises, to protect the well-being of students and faculty, and to assure that attendance of students at meetings is voluntary.
 5. The assignment of a teacher, administrator, or other school employee to a meeting for custodial purposes does not constitute sponsorship of the meeting or the participation in same.
 6. This Policy shall in no way lessen or alter the rights afforded student clubs by the Equal Access Act. School Officials shall comply with said law at all times.
 7. The term "non-instructional time" means time set aside by the school for club meetings or time before actual classroom instruction begins or after actual classroom instruction ends.

Complaint Resolution

Any student, parent of student, or any employee who believes this Policy has been violated is encouraged to immediately report the alleged acts of violation in accordance with the following procedure:

1. Such complaint shall be submitted in writing to the school principal who shall investigate, review and discuss the concern with the complaining party within five calendar days.
2. If, following an investigation, it is determined that a violation has occurred, the principal shall undertake necessary corrective action to preclude reoccurrence and shall provide the complaining party with written notification of his/her findings.

3. If the complaining party is not satisfied by the actions taken by the principal, he/she may, within five (5) calendar days of his/her receipt of the written notification from the principal, request in writing an appeal before the Administrative Committee of the Board for reconsideration of the principal's decision. Such appeal will be informal and shall be heard within fifteen (15) days of the filing of such appeal.
4. The Board prohibits retaliation against any individuals who file complaints or who participate in the investigation of complaints.

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