

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

In order to ensure that King George County Schools uphold constitutional standards within the religiously neutral role assigned the public schools, the following questions established by the United States Supreme Court should be asked of each school sponsored observance, program, instructional or other activity involving religious content, ceremony, or celebration:

- What is the purpose of the activity? Is the purpose secular in nature?
- What is the primary effect of the activity? Is it the celebration of religion? Does the activity either advance or inhibit religion?
- Does the activity involve an excessive entanglement with a religion, religious group, or between the schools and a religious organization? Are funds of a religious origin being used for a school activity? Does either the school or religious activity require the consent or approval of the other?

If the purpose of the activity is not secular, if the effect of the activity is to advance or inhibit religion, or if the activity involves an excessive entanglement, then the activity is unconstitutional and will not be permitted in the King George County Schools.

DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Although it is difficult to give a conclusive definition of a religious organization, there are certain characteristic forms of human activity which are commonly recognized as religious. Therefore, any group subscribing to one or more of the following practices may be defined as religious:

- Has as its primary purpose belief in gods or a God;
- Has a theological creed and form of worship;
- Accepts supernatural revelation;
- Seeks spiritual salvation;
- Has a prescribed set of theological rituals;
- Has been declared to be a religious organization by the Federal government or the Commonwealth of Virginia for tax purposes or by the courts;
- Has a legally recognized organization of ordained ministers ministering to congregations;
- Has regular services, meetings, or assemblies at which a particular set of spiritual beliefs is advanced;
- Claims to be religious or spiritual;
- Has an established system denying or objecting to religious belief.

1. School Hours - "School hours" includes the time from one-half hour before school until one-half hour after school.
2. Sponsorship - "Sponsorship" means endorsement and/or the advancement of money to support an activity.

SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

In order to provide guidance in the interpretation of the School Division's policy on school ceremonies and observances, the following policy statements are adopted and apply to such school activities:

1. Religious heritages and their histories, arts, symbols, and tenets may properly be included within a program of religiously neutral education. Such studies must be objective in nature and directly related to the broader educational purposes in the various fields of study.
2. At no time shall any form of religious belief or systems denying or objecting to belief be advanced or disparaged, nor shall any form of religious indoctrination or exercise, including prayers, be conducted by the School Division or its employees.
3. The historical and contemporary significance and the symbols and origins of religious holidays may be studied within the guidelines of this policy.
4. Music, art, literature, and drama related to religious holidays may be studied and performed in programs if they are presented in an objective and neutral manner as a tradition of the cultural heritage of the particular holiday. Such programs should be part of a curricular unit and should be simply staged and costumed.
5. In response to class questions and assignments, students are free to initiate expressions of religious belief or non-belief through compositions, art forms, music, speech, and debate.
6. Student groups sponsored by the Division shall not perform as part of a religious worship service.

RELIGIOUS RECRUITMENT ON SCHOOL PROPERTIES

No person shall be allowed to recruit students for a religious purpose or organization on school properties during school hours or at school-sponsored activities.

EXEMPTIONS FROM REQUIRED INSTRUCTION

If the religious belief and teachings of a student or his/her parents or legal guardian are contrary to the content of a school subject, or to any part of a school course or activity, the student shall be exempt from participation. To receive such an exemption, the parent or legal guardian must present a written request for exemption to the school principal stating the conflict involved.

Exemptions from required instruction do not excuse a pupil from the total credit hours required for graduation.

STUDENT ABSENCES AND EXCUSES

Regular attendance is of prime importance in the educational process. All students are expected to attend school for all days of the established school calendar as approved annually by the School Board and in compliance with the Virginia School Attendance Law. When requested by the parent or guardian, students will be excused for observance of religious holidays.

USE OF SCHOOL GROUNDS AND FACILITIES BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

- Places - Religious organizations may use school grounds and facilities only after school hours and on an equal basis with other organizations, including payment of rent, if any. Use of school facilities or grounds does not constitute endorsement. Note: Religious organizations who wish to rent school facilities for religious purposes refer to Policy KG, Community Use of School Facilities.
- Communication - Religious groups and organizations may announce their meetings on designated public bulletin board(s) provided they meet school restrictions (i.e., card size, including the name of the group or organization, the activity, the date, place, time, and person and phone number to call for further information).

CHALLENGE PROCEDURE

The challenge procedure associated with policy INB-R, Teaching About Controversial Issues, will be used to respond to citizen challenges to the implementation of this policy.

SEVERABILITY

Each section of this policy shall be deemed severable from each other section, and, if any section shall be found by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid. The remaining section shall continue in full force and effect.

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