

POLICY	BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY, MARYLAND
RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION	SECTION 427
427.1 Student Prayer and Religious Discussion 427.2 Graduation Prayer and Baccalaureates 427.3 Official Neutrality Regarding Religious Activity 427.4 Teaching About Religion 427.5 Student Requests for Excusal Due to Religious Reasons 427.6 Teaching Values 427.7 Student Clubs 427.8 Questions regarding Religious Expression	Adopted: 1/10/07 Reviewed: 12/13/06

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution requires public school officials to be neutral in their treatment of religion. A school system can neither show favoritism toward nor hostility against religious activity and protects religious activity that is initiated by private individuals. Accordingly, it is the board's position that schools be guided by applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religious clauses of the First Amendment.

427.1 Student Prayer and Religious Discussion

- A. Students have the same right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day as they do to engage in other comparable activity. For example, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray before tests to the same extent they may engage in comparable, nondisruptive activities.
- B. Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments.
- C. The principal may exercise discretion to impose rules of order and other pedagogical restrictions on student activities and may intercede to stop student speech that constitutes harassment aimed at a student or a group of students.
- D. Students may elect to participate in before or after school events such as "See You at the Flagpole" gatherings on the same terms that they may participate in other noncurricular activities on school premises. School system employees may neither encourage nor discourage participation in such events and school officials may only be present to monitor for supervision but may not participate.
- E. Teachers and administrators should ensure that no student is in any way coerced to participate in a religious activity.

427.2 Graduation Prayer and Baccalaureates

Under current Supreme Court decisions, school officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation ceremonies nor organize religious baccalaureate services. If a

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school generally opens its facilities to private groups, it must make its facilities available on the same terms to organizers of privately sponsored religious baccalaureate services.

427.3 Official Neutrality Regarding Religious Activity

School employees, when acting in their official capacities, are representatives of the state and are prohibited by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment from soliciting or encouraging religious activity and from participating in such activity with students.

427.4 Teaching about Religion

- A. Although teachers are not to advocate a religious viewpoint during instruction, teachers may teach about religion in the context of the history of religion, comparative religion, scripture as literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries. Similarly it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies.
- B. Teachers may teach about religious aspects of the holidays and schools may celebrate the secular aspects of holidays.

427.5 Student Requests for Excusal Due to Religious Reasons

Students may be excused from an assignment or classroom discussion if their participation substantially burdens their religious beliefs. Absent a compelling curricular-related reason, requests shall not be unreasonably denied. If approved, the student shall be provided an alternative assignment by the teacher.

427.6 Teaching Values

Though schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they play an active role with respect to teaching the tenets of the Character Counts program. The fact that some of these values are also held by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.

427.7 Student Clubs

At the secondary level, a student or a group of students may conduct or organize a religious club as allowed under the Equal Access Act (20 u.s.c. §§4071-74) and according to procedures outlined in regulation 400-58.

427.8 Questions regarding Religious Expression

Questions regarding religious expression should be directed to the executive director of legal services.

CROSS-REFERENCE:

- THE ANOTATED CODE OF MARYLAND §7-104
- COMAR 13A.04.04.01
- U.S. DEPT. OF EDUCATION'S *GUIDELINES ON RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS*