

Instruction

EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN SCHOOL

Employees of the Ledyard Public Schools shall not sponsor or otherwise initiate religious activity involving students while acting in their capacity as a District employee.

Religious activity that is initiated by students of their own volition, where the students are not acting as representatives of the school, will be permitted under the following guidelines:

1. School staff may not lead their classes in prayer, devotional readings from the Bible or other religious document, or other religious activities.
2. School staff may not attempt to persuade or compel students to participate in prayer or other religious activities.
3. Students may voluntarily pray at any time in the classroom, provided that such prayer is not disruptive of the educational process. In some cases, students may be excused from the classroom in order to pray. In some cases, students may be dismissed from school to participate in off-premises religious instruction or to remove a significant burden on their religious practice. Students who wish to leave the classroom or school premises must request prior permission to do so. All requests must be submitted in writing to the building administrator by the student's parent or guardian (or the student if aged 18 or older or a legally emancipated minor).
4. Students may also voluntarily pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. This includes reading scripture, saying grace before meals and praying with fellow students during recess, lunch or other non-instructional time to the same extent they may engage in other non-religious activities.
5. During official moments of silence, students are free to pray silently or not to pray. School employees may neither encourage nor discourage prayer during this period.
6. Prayer groups, religious clubs, and religious gatherings before and after school may be organized by students to the same extent students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activities groups. Such groups have access to school facilities to the same extent given to other non-curricular groups without discrimination because of the religious content of their expression. Student groups who engage in prayer as one of their activities will be permitted to advertise or announce their meetings using school services, such as a public address system, school newspaper, bulletin board or through handing out leaflets, in the same manner as student groups who meet for non-religious purposes.
7. Students are not prohibited from expressing religious beliefs in homework, artwork and other written and oral projects or presentations within the context of the assignment. Grading shall be based upon academic standards without regard to religious content or message. However, teachers are not required to permit students to make religious presentations to other students in the classroom.
8. Students may pray with fellow students during the school day on the same terms and conditions that they may engage in other conversation or speech.
9. Teachers, administrators, and other school employees are prohibited from encouraging or discouraging prayer and from actively participating in such activity with students during the school day or at school-sponsored activities. Teachers, administrators, and other school employees may engage in prayer or other religious activities with other

school staff to the same extent that teachers, administrators, and other school employees are permitted to meet, to participate in, or to discuss, matters unrelated to school business.

10. Students may not be selected to speak at student assemblies or extracurricular events on a basis that favors or disfavors religious viewpoints. Where the event is such that student speakers will be asked to speak from their own perspective, the school will express to the audience that the viewpoints offered are those of the speakers and not the school. Where a student is selected to give a speech on behalf of the school or the student body, the student's speech may be edited to omit inappropriate language or language that espouses religious views.

11. School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation, nor select speakers that favor religious speech such as prayer. Graduation is a school-sponsored event that is arranged, orchestrated and controlled by school officials. Students and other speakers selected by students, school staff and/or administration to speak at graduation are likely to be perceived to represent the school. The speeches given by such individuals are likely to be perceived by the audience to be endorsed by the school. Therefore, graduation speeches may be edited to omit inappropriate language or language that espouses religious views.

12. School administrators possess substantial discretion to impose rules of order and pedagogical restrictions on student activities. However such rules and restrictions will not be structured or administered in a manner that discriminates against student prayer or religious speech.

13. The Ledyard Board of Education takes into account the religious needs and requirements of students. Students are allowed a reasonable number of excused absences from school, without penalties, to observe religious holidays within their traditions. Students may be asked to complete makeup assignments or examinations in conjunction with such absences. If necessary, students are to be given extensions of time on their assignments so that they do not conflict with any religious observances. Students are allowed to refrain from participating in club or sports activities, without penalties, to observe religious holidays within their traditions.

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LEDYARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Ledyard, Connecticut