

**I. Policy Statement**

The Board of Education recognizes and accepts its responsibility to uphold the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Public schools may neither advance nor inhibit any religion but should exercise neutrality toward religion in its policies.

The Board further recognizes the significant role religion has played in the public life, arts, and culture of this nation and the world and supports the inclusion of religious history and tradition where appropriate in the curriculum. Such instruction must not seek to convert, proselytize, or favor or exclude a particular religion, nor compromise or infringe upon the religious beliefs or practices of students or staff.

**II. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines related to the inclusion of religion and religious materials in instruction and during school-related activities.

**III. Definitions**

- A. Proselytizing – Attempting to convert another to one’s own beliefs.
- B. Religion – A recognized system of belief or worship encompassing the nature of a deity and/or reality and the relationship of human beings to that deity and/or reality.
- C. Religious symbol – Any object or image that is associated with a religion.

**IV. Standards**

- A. Instructional materials on religion or which include information about religion should be evaluated and selected according to criteria and procedures employed for all instructional materials, in accordance with Policy 8040, Selection of Instructional Materials.
- B. Instruction related to religion must be factually objective and neutral. Curriculum may include the study of religion and religious influences, but may not promote the practice of any religion.

- C. Guest speakers may be invited to address the study of religion and religious influences in accordance with Policy 8060, Resource Speakers and Policy 8050, Teaching of Controversial Issues. Information must be free of proselytizing.
- D. Instruction and information about religious holidays must be limited to their origins, history, and traditions.
- E. The use of art, drama, music or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves the essential curriculum.
- F. School-sponsored concerts and musical programs should not be religious or religiously oriented. An acceptable music program may include cultural, religious, and secular seasonal selections representative of various lands and religions. If religious selections are included, the overall effect must strive for balance among various cultural, religious, and secular themes.
- G. Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids or resources as examples of cultural or religious heritage; however, they shall not be displayed for devotional purposes and may be displayed only on a temporary basis as part of the academic program. Teachers should not require the use of religious symbols in assignments unless such use meets a specific curricular objective.
- H. Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments, free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school.
- I. As government employees, employees of the Howard County Public School System are subject to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and thus required to be neutral concerning religion while carrying out their duties.
- J. School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation, nor organize religious baccalaureate ceremonies. If a 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. A school may not extend preferential treatment to baccalaureate ceremonies and must disclaim official endorsement of such ceremonies.

## **V. Compliance**

- A. The Superintendent/designee is responsible for ensuring that the criteria for the selection of instructional materials is in compliance with this policy.
- B. The Superintendent/designee is responsible for ensuring that curriculum is developed in compliance with this policy.

- C. The principal/designee is responsible for ensuring that school-based instruction as well as school-sponsored programs and events are in compliance with this policy.
- D. The Superintendent/designee is responsible for determining whether a system of belief or worship is recognized as a religion for purposes of this policy.

## **VI. Delegation of Authority**

The Superintendent is authorized to develop appropriate procedures for the implementation of this policy.

## **VII. References Must be Verified**

- A. Legal
  - United States Constitution as Amended, First Amendment
  - United States Internal Revenue Code (26 USC Section 501(c)(3))
  - The Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, Section 7-104 (Opening Activities)
  - COMAR 13A.04.04, Religious Education
- B. Other Board Policies
  - Policy 3000 Religious Observances
  - Policy 8010 Grading and Reporting: Pre-kindergarten Through Grade 8
  - Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: High School
  - Policy 8040 Selection of Instructional Materials
  - Policy 8050 Teaching of Controversial Issues
  - Policy 8060 Resource Speakers
  - Policy 9020 Students' Rights and Responsibilities

## **VIII. History**

ADOPTED: September 7, 1971

REVIEWED: July 1, 2014

MODIFIED:

REVISED: April 3, 1990

September 28, 1995

May 11, 2000

July 13, 2006

EFFECTIVE: July 13, 2006