

RELIGION IN OUR SCHOOLS**General Policy Statement**

It is the policy of Buncombe County Schools to comply with all existing state and federal laws, including case law, regarding religion and religious expression in public schools. In accordance with the law and the guidance published by the U.S. Department of Education¹, it is the policy of the Buncombe County Schools to allow students and employees to engage in the expression of personal religious views or beliefs within the parameters of current law and to maintain appropriate respect regarding religious freedoms in the school environment.

The Buncombe County Schools will neither advance nor inhibit any religion or religious belief, viewpoint, expression, or practice.

To further this policy, the Superintendent of the Buncombe County Schools will provide continuous professional development for administration and staff members which may include, but not be limited to the following topics: distribution of religious materials by students and non-students; display of religious symbols by the school, employees, and others; and lack of bias for school officials, employees and volunteers. In providing this training, Buncombe County Schools will use a selection of appropriate materials, including the guidance published by the U.S. Department of Education.

Religion in School Activities

As required by law, school officials and employees while acting in their official capacities, shall not use their positions to disparage, endorse, or promote a particular religious belief, viewpoint or practice. Furthermore, school officials and employees are prohibited from encouraging or discouraging student prayer or other religious expression unless such expression results in the material or substantial disruption of the educational environment.

To the maximum extent possible, Buncombe County Schools will permit the free exercise of religion by students and staff, as protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, subject only to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions that are necessary to preserve a safe and orderly school environment.

Principals are encouraged to consult with the Superintendent if they believe that a school-sponsored activity raises a question as to whether the activity might violate the Establishment or Free Exercise Clauses or the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. As needed, the Superintendent may consult with the board attorney to determine a legally appropriate course of action. If an activity violates constitutional requirements regarding religious activities, it will be prohibited.

The Superintendent shall publish a list of guidelines regarding religious expression by students and staff.

All instructional material used by teachers and other instructional employees must also conform to Board Policy 3200.

For Distribution of material by non-student groups, see Policy 5210 and 5210R.

¹See *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*; http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html

Takes the place of Policy 652

History of Policy 652

Adopted: April 12, 2012

Updated NCSBA policy format and policy number assigned on: January 23, 2017