Policy 609 RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL OBSERVANCES

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy, in alignment with the Northfield Public Schools Strategic Plan, is to identify the status of religion as it pertains to the programs of the Northfield School District while fostering an environment of equity, student well-being, and mutual respect.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. The district shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or nonbelief. Instead, the district encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for and tolerance of each other's views.

B. The district also recognizes that religion plays a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization.

C. The district recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase its students' knowledge and appreciation of music, art, drama, and literature which may have a religious basis or origin as well as a secular importance.

D. The district supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.

E. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of various religions, holidays, customs, and beliefs shall, if used, be explained in an unbiased and nonsectarian manner.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

A. The superintendent or their designee shall be responsible for ensuring that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs, and holidays in the district is in keeping with the following guidelines:

1. The proposed study or activity must have a secular purpose.

2. The primary objective of the study or activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.

3. The study or activity must not foster excessive governmental relationships with religion.

4. Notwithstanding the foregoing guidelines, reasonable efforts must be

made to accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from a curricular activity for a religious observance or American Indian cultural practice, observance, or ceremony. The district must provide annual notice to parents/guardians/caregivers of this policy.

B. **Outside Speakers.** Outside speakers are permitted in accordance with Policy 644 Guest Speakers. Speakers may present informational and historical information about religion, but will not proselytize. The staff member in charge should advise each speaker of Policy 609.

C. The superintendent or their designee is granted authority to develop and present for school board review and approval directives and guidelines for the purpose of providing further guidance relative to the teaching of materials related to religion. Approved directives and guidelines shall be attached as an addendum to this policy.

Policy 609 Religion
Adopted: 12.10.2007; Updated: 05.2013; 10.26.2026; Non-Substantive Update: 04.20.2022; Substantive Update: 08.12.2024

Board of Education
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 659
Northfield, Minnesota

Legal References:

U. S. Const., amend. I
Minn. Stat. § 120A.22, Subd. 12 (Compulsory Instruction)
Minn. Stat. § 120A.35 (Absence from School for Religious and Cultural Observances)
Minn. Stat. § 121A.10 (Moment of Silence)
Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 533 U.S. 98 (2001)
Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. V. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000)
Tangipahoa Parish Bd. Of Educ. V. Freiler, 530 U.S. 1251(2000)
Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S.602, (1971)
Child Evangelism Fellowship v. Minneapolis Special Sch. Dist. No. 1, 690 F.3d 996 (8th Cir.2012)
Wigg v. Sioux Falls Sch. Dist., 382 F.3d 807 (8th Cir. 2004)
Doe v. School Dist. of City of Norfolk, 340 F.3d 605 (8th Cir. 2003)
Stark v. Independent Sch. Dist. No. 640, 123 F.3d 1068 (8th Cir. 1997)
Florey v. Sioux Falls Sch. Dist. 49-5, 619 F.2d 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)
Roark v. South Iron R-1 Sch. Dist. 573 F.3d 556 (8th Cir. 2009)
Child Evangelism Fellowship v. Elk River Area Sch. Dist. No. 728, 599 F.Supp.2d 1136 (D.Minn. 2009)
LeVake v. Independent Sch. Dist. No. 656, 625 N.W.2d 502 (Minn. App. 2001)
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. 169-J (Feb. 14, 1968)
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. 169-K (Oct. 21, 1949)
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. No. 63 (1940)
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. No. 120 (1924)
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. No. 121 (1924)

Cross References:

MSBA/MASA Model Policy 801 (Equal Access to School Facilities)