

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

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The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states, in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Court rulings have interpreted the First Amendment as applying to public schools. The First Amendment requires that public schools not encourage, advocate, or teach one religion over another or religion over non-religion. In accordance with the law, employees of Mountain Brook Schools must refrain from any of these activities.

The overriding principle is that public schools must be neutral regarding religion by not being perceived as promoting religion OR non-religion.

The Board of Education recognizes that while public schools may not teach religion as truth or non-religion as truth, no education is complete without teaching about the role of religion in history and culture. Schools may teach about religion, but may not teach religion (or non-religion) as truth.

The following statements, which are based on court decisions, constitute appropriate and inappropriate study of religion in the schools, are also statements of policy of the Mountain Brook Board of Education regarding the study of religion.

1. The school may sponsor the study of religion, but should not promote or encourage the practice of religion. The teaching of religion should be conducted within the context of courses when necessary to meet required standards.
2. The school’s approach to religion is one of instruction, not indoctrination.
3. The school may teach about different beliefs, but should not teach a student what he or she should believe.
4. School professional personnel may conduct *discussion* about religious concepts, practices, and disciplines provided that such discussion is part of an inclusive study of religion or germane to the study of a particular region or country.
5. Religious discussion should be objective, academic, and informational, and that the leader of the discussion does not advocate any particular form of religious practice.

Court rulings regarding the First Amendment also require schools to permit the free exercise of religion by students while at school or school-related events.

The school system wishes to remain sensitive to the concerns and suggestions of parents regarding religious issues since parents have the primary responsibility for directing the education of their children consistent with their religious convictions.

Adopted: September 17, 2018