

POLICY

SOMERSET COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION

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| Date Submitted: November, 1975 Date Reviewed: January 17, 2006 March 17, 2009 September 18, 2018 | Number: 600-25 |
| Subject: Religious Observation | Date Approved: December, 1975 February 21, 2006 May 26, 2009 September 18, 2018 Date Revised: March 17, 2009 September 9, 2018 Date Effective: February 21, 2006 May 26, 2009 September 18, 2018 |

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to inform the professional employees of the Somerset County Public School System of the provisions concerning the exercise and expression of religion by students and staff.

2. GUIDELINES

- A. Students' absences for observation of a religious holiday are considered lawful subject to provisions of SCPS Policy #600-07: Attendance – Elementary & Secondary.
- B. Students with a documented religious obligation that cannot be fulfilled except during the school day may receive a reasonable accommodation to meet that obligation.
- C. The essential curriculum cannot be waived for religious reasons except as provided in Maryland law and regulation.
- D. Pursuant to the federal Equal Access Act, students in secondary schools may form religious clubs. Student-initiated religious clubs may not be sponsored by schools but must be afforded the same treatment as other extra-curricular student groups that meet during non-instructional time.
- E. When students are not engaged in instruction or school-related activities, they may voluntarily pray individually or in groups and discuss their religious views, as long as such behavior is not disruptive or coercive.

- F. Within the provisions of SCPS Policy 600-12: Student Dress Code students may wear attire as an expression of their religious practice. *“Nothing in these regulations is intended to intrude on the constitutional, religious or statutory rights of any student as long as in the exercise of these rights, students do not create a threat to the good order of the school or cause the disruption of any recognized school function. The exercise of such rights by students must be consistent with the public purposes for which the public schools have been established. Policy 600-12 2D”*
- G. School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation, nor may they 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.
- H. A Principal may include a moment of silence of approximately one minute as part of opening exercises each morning as an appropriate response to special circumstances affecting the school community. During this moment of silence, a student or staff member may silently meditate, pray or read scripture.
- I. Staff absences due to observance of a religious holiday or fulfillment of a documented religious obligation when schools and/or offices are open must follow procedures outlined in an employee handbook, personnel policy, or the appropriate negotiated agreement.