

## PRAYER IN THE SCHOOLS

It is the policy of the Jackson Public School District Board of Trustees not to prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in the district's schools, consistent with current guidance issued by all state and federal laws and regulations. Under federal guidelines, students have the following rights:

1. To engage in private, non-disruptive activity such as prayer or bible reading while at school;
2. To participate in before or after school events that have a religious content;
3. To study about religion when appropriate to the curriculum;
4. To produce written expressions of religious beliefs in home work, art work, and other assignments;
5. To distribute in a non-disruptive manner, subject to reasonable restrictions as to time, place, and manner, religious literature;
6. To be excused for religious reasons from participation in school programs or activities;
7. To be granted release time to attend religious events;
8. To wear clothing that includes a non-disruptive religious theme or message;
9. To be given access to school media to announce religious events in the same manner as other organizations; and,
10. To be granted access to school facilities for religious activities in the same manner as other organizations.

Students shall not coerce or intimidate other students to listen or participate in their private exercise of religious activities. Likewise, no student shall be harassed or ridiculed because of his/her participation in religious activities.

Distribution of literature and materials, including those of a religious nature, shall be done in accordance with Board policies regarding the distribution of literature and materials applicable to all groups. The school cannot endorse or sponsor the distribution of outside literature or an outside organization.

School administrators, teachers and staff shall take a neutral approach regarding the promotion of prayer or other religious activities in schools or at school-sponsored events. They cannot interfere with students exercising their religious rights as permitted by law and they cannot tell or

suggest to students that they should pray or participate in religious activities. Prayer over the intercom or at school-related activities shall not be allowed except as specifically stated above.

Students may begin the school day with a brief period of quiet reflection of up to 60 seconds. This is not intended to be a religious service or exercise. Administrators, teachers and staff should not conduct themselves in any manner that would suggest that this period of quiet reflection is a time of prayer but should remain neutral in this activity.

The school board shall be permitted to open its meetings with a brief non-sectarian, non-proselytizing invocation to solemnize the occasion. Only board members shall be permitted to present these invocations.

The Board is committed to following the law and to protecting the freedoms of all students, both those who wish to exercise their religious freedoms and those who prefer not to exercise those rights.

This policy supersedes any other Board policy that might be inconsistent with it.

SOURCE: Mississippi School Board Association

DATE: December 20, 2016