

517 - REFLECTION & PRAYER ACCOMMODATION POLICY

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| <p>GENERAL BELIEFS</p> | <p>The Providence Public School Department (PPSD) believes that all students can and must learn at high achievement levels. To that end, the Providence community of parents, educators, and community members can, and must, have a positive and profound impact on the lives of its young people. Providence Public School Depart schools can, and must, be welcoming, safe and engaging places to teach and to learn. Providence families and the entire Providence community can, and must, support our students physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally, so that they are college and career ready and able to compete globally.</p> |
| <p>PURPOSE AND SCOPE</p> | <p>Religiously mandated practices for students are protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which upholds the right to freedom of religion. The First Amendment protects religious exercise such as prayer and dietary rules, as well as religious expression such as mandated clothing, from unwarranted government interference and discrimination. It also guarantees the right of a student to engage in personal worship or prayer, so long as it is student initiated and does not disrupt classroom instruction. Furthermore, there is nothing in the <u>First Amendment</u> that converts public schools into religion-free zones, or requires students, teachers, or other school officials to leave their private religious expression behind at the schoolhouse door (U.S. Department of Education).</p> <p>PPSD is committed to establishing culturally responsive and sustaining practices and accommodating the needs of all students. In an effort to support our students, families, and receiving schools, the following guidance has been developed.</p> |
| <p>DEFINITIONS</p> | <p>The following definitions are provided to assist in understanding this policy and the legal obligations of the District:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally Responsive Learning Environment-A culturally responsive learning environment is one in which every student's culture, language, and life experiences are acknowledged, validated, celebrated, and connected to what they learn in school. ● Prayer: Prayer is a religious act or ritual in which an individual or group of people engage in meditation or passive reflection. Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. Depending on the circumstance, there may be different requirements for prayer, for various groups and/or individuals, which may include practices such as kneeling, bowing, or bowing of the head, genuflection, prostration, and/ or quiet meditation. ● Reflection: Reflection is the act of stepping back to think quietly, about one's thoughts, feelings, and actions. This can help one to gain a better understanding of self and identify areas for celebration, contemplation, and improvement. The ultimate goals are positive reinforcement, affirmation, and realization. Reflection is sometimes referred to as mindfulness or meditation. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School Leadership Team: Members of the school community who the Principal has empowered to work collaboratively with school administrators, to make decisions. This team may include students, faculty, and parents/guardians. |
| GUIDELINES | <p>The Providence Public School Department’s core beliefs are set forth in the Foundations, Core Beliefs, and Commitments Policy. These core beliefs serve as a foundation for this policy, and all policies, and govern its implementation.</p> |
| IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES | <p>The Superintendent and/or the Office of Equity and Belonging, will develop <u>Administrative Regulations</u>. These Regulations will provide greater details that will guide the full implementation of this policy. The Regulations must address each of the following five strategies, minimally:</p> <p>Create Systems and Structures School leadership teams will create structures and systems designed to support a welcoming environment in which students, faculty, and parents/guardians feel a sense of belonging, they should plan for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consult with parents/guardians to obtain details on requested prayer times and/or student-specific accommodations. ● Attempt to schedule breaks during non-instructional time, which may be used by students for prayer or quiet reflection. ● Structure the time for prayer breaks to include any necessary cleansing rituals. ● Designate a private space for students to pray with access to washing facilities. ● Identify at least two adult liaisons or representatives to manage student prayer or quiet reflection requests and logistics. ● Provide supervision, particularly for younger students during moments where prayer or quiet reflection is permitted, while still allowing student privacy during that time. ● Notify staff that students may be fasting during certain religious seasons such as Ramadan or Lent, which may make it difficult for them to participate in some school activities, and/or remain at optimum readiness to take assessments ● Provide alternative spaces for students who are fasting and who may have difficulty participating in lunch, physical education, and/or activities that involve celebrations that include food and drink ● Provide alternative testing windows for students who are fasting and who may have difficulty participating during the scheduled testing windows <p>Develop Space Accommodations The following conditions will be met for students who request a space to pray during the school day:</p> |

- An empty classroom, office and/or room (faculty/staff directly supervising)
 - **Must** be a private and respectful area
 - **Must** be an area where the student(s) will not be interrupted
- Designated/identified area for student's prayer rug to be kept if student chooses to leave it at school

Develop Accommodations to Support Non-instructional Time

Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. For example, students may be permitted time to:

- Read their holy text other scriptures
- Say grace before meals
- Pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other non-instructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities

School authorities may impose rules of order and pedagogical restrictions on student activities; however, they may not discriminate against student prayer or religious perspectives in applying such rules and restrictions.

Develop Accommodations to Support Instructional Time

Schools have the discretion to dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction, provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation in such instruction or penalize students for attending or not attending. If a school has a practice of dismissing students from school for non-religious purposes, it must also provide for dismissal from the premises for religious purposes. Similarly, schools may excuse students from class to remove a significant burden on their religious exercise, including prayer, where doing so would not impose material burdens on other students. Students are not required to leave their instructional space and may, for example, bow their heads to pray to themselves, before taking a test.

Develop Accommodations to Support Organized Groups and Activities

- Students may organize prayer groups and religious clubs to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activity groups.
 - Such groups must be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is given to other non-curricular groups, without discrimination because of the groups' religious character or perspective.
- School officials should neither encourage nor discourage participation in student-run activities based upon the activities' religious character or perspective.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools may take reasonable steps to ensure that students are not pressured to participate (or not to participate) in such religious activities. <p><i>Note: Teachers, administrators and other school employees may engage in private prayer during the workday while they are not acting in their official capacities. Schools may not be able to accommodate adults who, due to their religion, require time and space to pray, during the school day, due to supervision and/or safety considerations. Furthermore, employees may not, compel, coerce, persuade, or encourage students to join in the employee's prayer or other religious activity.</i></p> |
| <p>TRAINING, OVERSIGHT, AND COMMUNICATION</p> | <p>District- The Superintendent, and/or the Office of Equity and Belonging, will review this policy every 2 years. The Superintendent will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this policy, ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All members of PPSD follow this policy ● This policy will be posted on the District's website and will be updated annually with such additional sections of explanation, expansion or clarification as the Superintendent or School Board may deem appropriate. ● Every student will receive annual notification of this policy and the accompanying regulations. ● Printed copies of this policy and regulations will be available at every school for students and parents/guardians upon request. ● This policy will be prominently posted on the homepage of the District website <p>School-The School Principal will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this policy and the accompanying regulations, ensuring that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employ a variety of measures to communicate this policy to the school community. Such measures may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student and parental/family/guardian meetings and/or conferences ○ Open house ○ School town meetings ○ Digital or paper newsletters ● Provide all staff with the training and continuous professional development required to ensure they understand and follow this policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professional development for staff regarding expectations for creating a culturally responsive, warm and welcoming school and classroom environment ○ Professional development for staff regarding this policy and regulations and all other related policies referenced in this document |

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| COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS, CONFIDENTIALITY REQUIREMENTS | The Superintendent, and/or the Office of Equity and Belonging, will ensure that all PPSD personnel and all PPSD contractors comply fully with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations, and with all Board Policies. In the event any part of any Policy is unlawful, the Superintendent will report such event to the Board as soon as practicable and request of the Board a modification of this Policy. |
| LEGAL REFERENCES | Rhode Island General Laws § 16-12-3.1 |
| REFERENCES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPSD Racial and Ethnic Equity Policy • PPSD Bullying and Harassment Policy • PPSD Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy • PPSD Foundations, Core Beliefs, and Commitments Policy • Pew Research: Christian Traditions • Pew Research: Jewish Beliefs and Practices • Religious Practices of Muslim Students in Public Schools • US Department of Education: Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, May 15, 2023, Section 8524(a) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act and codified at 20 U.S.C. § 7904(a). |
| HISTORY | <p>Revisions and Updates: Created as regulation September 2023, Revised October 2023, Revised April 2024, Policy Committee August 2024 First Read: Second Read:</p> |
| APPROVED | |