

517 - PRAYER GUIDANCE

<p>Purpose</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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Nothing in the First Amendment 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 practices and accommodating the needs of all students. In an effort to support our students, families, and receiving schools, the following Prayer guidance has been developed.</p>
<p>Definitions</p>	<p>The following definitions apply to this guidance:</p> <p><u>Prayer</u>: 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.</p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p><u>Muslim Prayer</u>: Islam prescribes five daily prayers throughout the day, a practice observed by many Muslims. The prayers take place during the following windows of time: dawn to sunrise; midday to late afternoon; late afternoon to before sunset; sunset to dusk; and after dusk.</p> <p><i>Before praying, Muslims are required to wash their hands, mouth, nose, face, arms, and feet. It is recommended that students are allowed to utilize the restroom prior to beginning prayer. During the prayer, Muslims quietly recite from the Quran and other prayers as they stand, bow, and/or lie stretched out on the ground with their face</i></p>

	<p>down on a clean surface such as a prayer rug. The estimated time required for washing and prayer is about ten to fifteen minutes.</p>
<p>Guidelines</p>	<p>Prayer Space Conditions</p> <p>For students who request a space to pray during the school day, please ensure the following conditions are provided for students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● an empty classroom, office and/or room (faculty/staff directly supervising) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>must</i> be a private and respectful area ○ <i>must</i> be an area where the student(s) will not be interrupted (while in prayer students will not be able to respond to someone talking to them, unless an emergency persists) ● designated/identified area for student’s prayer rug to be kept if student chooses to leave it at school <p>Accommodation of Prayer During Non-instructional Time</p> <p>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.</p> <p>For example, students may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● read their Bibles, Torahs, Korans, or 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 <p>Note: School authorities may impose rules of order and pedagogical restrictions on student activities; however, <i>they may not discriminate against student prayer or religious perspectives in applying such rules and restrictions.</i></p> <p>Furthermore, teachers, administrators and other school employees may engage in private prayer during the workday <i>while they are not acting in their official capacities.</i> Employees may not, however, compel, coerce, persuade,</p>

or encourage students to join in the employee's prayer or other religious activity.

Accommodation of Prayer During 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.

Organized Prayer 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. Schools may take reasonable steps to ensure that students are not pressured to participate (or not to participate) in such religious activities.

Practical Suggestions for Schools

- Consult with parents/guardians to get details on requested prayer times or student-specific accommodations.
- If possible, try to schedule prayer breaks during non-instructional time.
- Make sure to structure the time for prayer breaks to include any necessary cleaning rituals.
- Make sure to 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 requests and logistics.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If supervising younger students during prayer breaks, supervision should still allow the student privacy to pray.
Legal References	20 U.S.C. § 7904(a) The Equal Access Act of 1984 R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-12-3.1
References	<p>Adapted from following resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Department of Education: <i>Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools</i>, 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). • Religious Practices of Muslim Students in Public Schools
History	Updated October 2023

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