

TRUMBULL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
POLICY MANUAL

SECTION: **6000**
CATEGORY: **Instruction**
POLICY CODE: **6115.1/Protected Prayer**

PROTECTED PRAYER

Policy

It is the policy of the Trumbull Board of Education to implement the requirements of constitutionally protected prayer in the public schools, consistent with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, United States Department of Education Guidelines and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Adopted: 10/07/03
Revised: 05/18/04, 05/7/13

Regulations

No Religious activities will be sponsored by the Trumbull Public Schools. Religious activities that are initiated by students of their own volition, where the students are not acting as representatives of the school, will be permitted.

1. School staff may not lead their classes in prayer, devotional readings from the Bible or other religious activities.
2. School staff may not attempt to persuade or compel students to participate in prayer or other religious activities.
3. Students may voluntarily pray at any time, provided that such prayer is not disruptive of the educational process.
4. Students may also voluntarily 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. This includes, but not limited to, reading scripture, saying grace before meals and praying with fellow students during recess, lunch or other non-instructional time to the same extent they may engage in other non-religious activities.
5. Students may pray with fellow students during the school day on the same terms and conditions that they may engage in other conversation or speech.
6. Prayer groups, religious clubs, and religious gatherings before and after school may be organized by students to the same extent students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activities groups. Such groups have access to school facilities to the same extent given to other non-curricular groups without discrimination because of the religious content of their expression. Student groups who engage in prayer as one of their activities will be permitted to advertise or announce their meetings using school services such as, but not limited to, a public address system, school newspaper, bulletin board or through handing out leaflets, in the same manner as student groups who meet for non-religious purposes.
7. Teachers, administrators, and other school employees are prohibited from encouraging or discouraging prayer and from actively participating in such activity with students during the school day or at school-sponsored activities. Teachers, administrators, and other school employees may engage in prayer or other religious activities with other school staff to the same extent that teachers, administrators, and other school employees are permitted to meet, to participate in, or to discuss, matters unrelated to school business.
8. During official moments of silence, students are free to pray silently or not to pray. School employees may neither encourage nor discourage prayer during this period.

Regulations cont'd

9. Students are not prohibited from expressing religious beliefs in homework, artwork and other written and oral projects or presentations within the context of the assignment. Grading shall be based upon academic standards without regard to religious content or message. However, teachers are not required to permit students to make religious presentations to other students in the classroom.
10. Students may not be selected to speak at student assemblies or extracurricular events on a basis that favors or disfavors religious viewpoints. Where the event is such that student speakers will be asked to speak from their own perspective, the school will express to the audience that the viewpoints offered are those of the speakers and not the school. Where a student is selected to give a speech on behalf of the school or the student body, the student's speech may be edited to omit inappropriate language or language that espouses religious views.
11. School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation, nor select speakers that favor religious speech such as prayer. Graduation is a school-sponsored event that is arranged, orchestrated and controlled by school officials. Students and other speakers selected by students, school staff and/or administration to speak at graduation are likely to be perceived to represent the school. The speeches given by such individuals are likely to be perceived by the audience to be endorsed by the school. Therefore, graduation speeches may be edited to omit inappropriate language or language that espouses religious views.
12. School administrators possess substantial discretion to impose rules of order and pedagogical restrictions on student activities; however such rules and restrictions will not be structured or administered in a manner that discriminates against student prayer or religious speech.
13. The Trumbull Board of Education takes into account the religious needs and requirements of students. Students are allowed a number of excused absences from school to observe religious holidays within their traditions. Students will be given appropriate opportunity to make up class work they have missed in order to complete curriculum requirements. Failure on the part of the student to complete his/her responsibility in making up missed work will impact his/her grade.
14. No school events (including rehearsals, performances, athletic practices and games) are to be scheduled on major religious holidays that are also school holidays, i.e. Good Friday, Yom Kippur and the eve and first full day of Rosh Hashanah. Normal school activities may proceed on religious holidays that are not school holidays. However, students cannot be required to attend nor are they to be penalized for missing class or homework, practices, games, rehearsals, performances, etc., because of religious observance. Students observing religious holidays that are not school holidays shall not be assigned homework on that day if a parent/guardian requests an exemption in a signed letter to the student's teacher. It is expected that the assignment is to be made up within a reasonable time after the holiday.

Regulations cont'd

15. Speakers at school events, including those delivering invocations, must adhere to these mandates and statutes.

References

- Section 9524, 9525 – No Child Left Behind Act
- U.S. Department of Education guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-16a
- Good News Club v. Milford Cent. Sch., 533 U.S. 98 (2001)
- Sante Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. V. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000)
- Hazelwood Sch. Dist. V. Kuhlmeier, 484 U.S. 260 (1988)
- Trumbull Board of Education policies:
 - School Day Opening Exercises, Policy Code: 6112.1
 - Interscholastic Athletic Policy, Policy Code: 6145.2
 - Homework, Policy Code: 6154
 - School Ceremonies and Observances, Policy Code: 6115
 - Student Absences and Procedures K-8, Policy Code: 5113.1
 - High School Attendance/Loss of Credit Policy, Policy Code: 5113