

**MODEL POLICY GOVERNING
VOLUNTARY RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

I. Student Speakers at Non-Graduation Events:

The district hereby creates a limited public forum consisting of an opportunity for a student to speak to introduce school events such as sports events, assemblies, opening announcements/greetings for the school day, pep-rallies, and other school events, as determined by the district. For each speaker, the district shall set a maximum time limit reasonable and appropriate to the occasion.

The forum shall be limited in the following manner: (a) Only those students in the highest two grade levels of the school and who hold one of the following positions of honor based on neutral criteria shall be eligible to use the limited public forum: student council officers, class officers of the highest grade level in the school, captain(s) of the football team, and other students holding positions of honor as the district may designate.

The eligible students shall be notified of their eligibility and those who wish to participate as an introducing speaker shall submit their names to the student council or other designated body during an announced minimum 3 day period. This announced period may be at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the preceding school year so student speakers are in place for the new year, or, if the selection process will be repeated each semester, at the beginning of each semester or at the end of the preceding semester so speakers are in place for the next semester. The names of the volunteering student speakers shall be randomly drawn until all names have been selected, and the names shall be listed in the order drawn. Each selected student will be matched chronologically to the event for which he/she will be giving the introduction. Each student may speak for one week at a time for all introductions of events that week, or rotate after each speaking event, or otherwise, as the district determines. The list of

student speakers shall be chronologically repeated as needed, in the same order. The district may repeat the selection process each semester rather than once a year.

The subject/topic of the student introductions must be related to the purpose of the event and to the purpose of marking the opening of the event, honoring the occasion, the participants, and those in attendance, bringing the audience to order, and focusing the audience on the purpose of the event. Although the subject/topic has been designated and a student must stay on the subject/topic, and the student may not engage in obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd, or indecent speech, the district shall treat student expression of religious viewpoints, if any, in the same manner as the district treats student expression of secular or other viewpoints, without discrimination.

For as long as there is a need to dispel confusion over the non-sponsorship of the student's speech, at each event in which a student will deliver an introduction, a disclaimer shall be stated in either written or oral form, such as, "The student giving the introduction for this event is a volunteering student selected on neutral criteria to introduce the event. The content of the introduction is the private expression of the student and does not reflect the endorsement, sponsorship, position, or expression of the school district."

Certain students who have attained special positions of honor within the school have traditionally addressed school audiences from time to time as a tangential component of their achieved positions of honor, such as the captain(s) of various sports teams, student council officers, class officers, homecoming kings and queens, prom kings and queens, and the like. Such students have attained their positions based upon neutral criteria. Nothing in this policy eliminates the continuation of the practice of having such students, irrespective of grade level, address school audiences in the normal course of their respective positions. The district shall

treat such students' expressions of religious viewpoints, if any, in the same manner as the district would treat such students' expressions of secular or other viewpoints, without discrimination.

II. Student Speakers at Graduation Ceremonies:

The district hereby creates a limited public forum consisting of an opportunity for a student to speak to begin graduation ceremonies and another student to speak to end graduation ceremonies. For each speaker, the district shall set a maximum time limit reasonable and appropriate to the occasion.

The forum shall be limited in the following manner: (a) Only students who are graduating who hold one of the following neutral criteria positions of honor shall be eligible to use the limited public forum: student council officers, class officers of the graduating class, and top three academically ranked graduates (or a shorter or longer list of student leaders as the district may designate). Any student, however, who will otherwise have a speaking role in the graduation ceremonies is ineligible to give the opening and closing. The names of the eligible volunteering students will be randomly drawn. The first name drawn will give the opening, and the second name drawn will give the closing.

The topic of the opening and closing must be related to the purpose of the graduation ceremonies and to the purpose of marking the opening and closing of the event, honoring the occasion, the participants, and those in attendance, bringing the audience to order, and focusing the audience on the purpose of the event.

In addition to the students giving the opening and closing, there are certain other students such as Valedictorians who have attained special positions of honor based upon neutral criteria who will have speaking roles at graduation ceremonies. For each such speaker, the district shall set a maximum time limit reasonable and appropriate to the occasion and to the position held by

the speaker. For this purpose, the district creates a limited public forum for these students to deliver such addresses. The subject/topic of the addresses must be related to the purpose of the graduation ceremonies, marking and honoring the occasion, honoring the participants and those in attendance, and the student's perspective on purpose, achievement, life, school, graduation, and looking forward to the future.

Although the subject/topic has been designated for each student speaker and a student must stay on the subject/topic, and the student may not engage in obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd, or indecent speech, the district shall treat student expression of religious viewpoints, if any, in the same manner as the district treats student expression of secular or other viewpoints, without discrimination.

A written disclaimer shall be printed in the graduation program that states, "The students who will be speaking at the graduation ceremonies were selected based upon neutral criteria to deliver messages of their own choice. The content of each student speaker's message is the private expression of the individual student and does not reflect any position or expression of the district, its board, administration, or employees, or necessarily indicate the views of any other graduate. The contents of these messages were prepared by the student volunteers, and the district refrained from any interaction with student speakers regarding the student speakers' viewpoints on permissible subjects/topics."

III. Religious Expression and Prayer in Class Assignments:

Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Students shall neither be penalized nor rewarded on account of religious content. Such home and classroom work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and

relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school. Thus, if a teacher's assignment involves writing a poem, the work of a student who submits a poem in the form of a prayer (for example, a psalm) should be judged on the basis of academic standards (such as literary quality) and neither penalized nor rewarded on account of its religious content.

IV. Organized Prayer Groups and Activities:

Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs, “see you at the pole” and other religious gatherings before, during, and after school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activities and 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 religious content of their expression. Where student groups that meet for nonreligious activities are permitted to advertise or announce their meetings—for example, by advertising in a student newspaper, putting up posters, making announcements on a student activities bulletin board or public address system, or handing out leaflets—school authorities may not discriminate against groups who meet for prayer or other religious speech. School authorities may disclaim sponsorship of non-curricular groups and events, provided they administer such disclaimers in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in prayer or other religious speech.