

# **Zenith Academy E/W Religious Expression & Accommodation Policy**

## **Commitment to Religious Freedom and Inclusion**

Zenith Academy E/W is committed to fostering a school environment where students of all religious backgrounds feel safe, respected, and valued. As a public school, we uphold the principles of religious freedom and ensure that students are protected from discrimination, harassment, or exclusion based on their religious beliefs, expressions, or practices.

In accordance with ORC Section 3320.03, our school guarantees that students have the right to freely express their religious beliefs in their words, actions, and attire without fear of retaliation or unfair treatment. Zenith Academy E/W recognizes the importance of religious identity in students' lives and actively works to create an inclusive and supportive educational atmosphere.

## **Religious Expression in School and Academics**

Under the **First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution**, students have the right to freely express their religious beliefs in school. This means they are permitted to:

- **Express their religious beliefs** through speech, artwork, projects, written assignments, and other academic work.
- **Read religious texts, pray, or engage in personal religious study** during recess, lunch, and other non-instructional time, including before and after school.
- **Discuss religion** with peers during the school day in the same manner they would discuss non-religious topics, provided the conversation is not disruptive and does not interfere with the learning environment.
- **Form religious student groups or clubs**, just as students can form other non-curricular groups, and hold meetings during non-instructional time.

All religious expressions must be student-led and voluntary. School officials and staff may not endorse or discourage religious activities, but they will ensure that students' rights to religious expression are upheld.

## **Religious Accommodations**

Zenith Academy E/W understands that students may have religious obligations that impact their school experience. Public school staff are required to take reasonable steps to accommodate a student's religious beliefs or practices, as long as it does not create an undue hardship. Undue hardship is defined as an accommodation that would be excessively costly, compromise safety, or infringe on the rights of others.

### **Examples of Religious Accommodations Include:**

- **Excused absences** for religious holidays, fasting, or religious ceremonies without penalty or disciplinary action.

- **Flexibility in assignments and assessments** for students observing religious practices, such as fasting or days of rest.
- **Alternative assignments** that achieve the same learning objectives when a student's religious beliefs conflict with a particular topic or activity.
- **Modifications to the dress code or uniform policy** to allow religious attire, such as head coverings, religious symbols, beards, or specific hairstyles required by faith traditions.
- **Adjustments to physical education activities** for students who observe religious modesty or fasting practices.
- **Meal accommodations** that consider religious dietary restrictions, ensuring that students have access to meals that align with their faith-based dietary laws.

Zenith Academy E/W also encourages teachers, staff, and event organizers to be mindful of major **religious holidays** when scheduling school-wide events, exams, or important deadlines.

Avoiding conflicts with significant religious observances ensures that all students can fully participate in their academic and extracurricular activities without compromising their faith.

## **Prevention of Religious Harassment and Discrimination**

Harassment or discrimination based on religion or creed is strictly prohibited at Zenith Academy E/W. Any behavior that ridicules, insults, threatens, or intimidates a student based on their religious identity will be taken seriously and addressed immediately.

School administrators and staff are required to:

- **Respond promptly** to reports of religious harassment or discrimination.
- **Investigate concerns** even if a formal complaint has not been filed by a student or parent.
- **Ensure that all students feel protected** from any hostile or exclusionary behavior related to their religious beliefs.
- **Educate students and staff** about religious tolerance and the importance of an inclusive school environment.

Any student who experiences or witnesses religious harassment should report it to a teacher, counselor, or school administrator so that appropriate action can be taken.

## **Creating a Culture of Respect and Understanding**

At Zenith Academy E/W, we believe that diversity in religious backgrounds enriches our school community. We encourage all students and staff to foster an environment of respect, learning, and understanding. By embracing religious inclusion and ensuring fair accommodations, we reaffirm our commitment to upholding students' rights and providing an education that respects the beliefs of all individuals.

For further information on religious accommodations or to report any concerns, please contact the school administration.