



Superintendent's Circular

School Year 2011-2012

NUMBER:
LGL-17

DATE:
September 1, 2011

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Issues related to religious expression in public schools involve constantly evolving concepts and issues of constitutional law. Therefore, staff members are strongly encouraged to bring specific questions of religious expression to the Office of Legal Advisor, 617-635-9320.

Some general principles include:

- Teachers, administrators and other school employees who, when acting in their official capacities are acting as agents of the state, must not encourage, discourage or participate in prayer or other religious expression.
- Although the First Amendment forbids religious activity that is sponsored by the government, it protects religious activity initiated by private individuals that is non-disruptive, including student prayer before meals or during non-instructional time. Such non-disruptive religious activity may also include speakers at student assemblies, extracurricular events or graduation ceremonies who are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria, who retain control over the content of their expression. Under such circumstances, school officials may make neutral disclaimers that the speech is the speaker's and not of the school.
- School officials may not compel students to participate in prayer or other religious activities.

For more information about this circular, contact:

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