Adopted: October 21, 2024
Revised: November 23, 2026

Great Oaks Academy

Religious Accommodation Policy No.510

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to identify the status of religion as it pertains to the programs and operations of Great Oaks Academy.

II. General Statement of Policy

A. Great Oaks Academy shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or non- belief.

B. Great Oaks Academy recognizes that religion has had and continues to have a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization and believes that including the role of religion in the development of humanity is essential to the curriculum. However, Great Oaks Academy will not endorse or celebrate any particular religion above or to the exclusion of any other.

C. Great Oaks Academy supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented in an objective manner.

D. The Director shall have the responsibility of ensuring that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs, and holidays at Great Oaks Academy complies with this policy.

III. Student Rights Regarding Religion

A. Student Prayer and Religious Discussion in School

1. Students may express and share their religious beliefs, carry religious materials (including scriptures such as the Bible, the Torah, or the Qur'an), read religious materials, pray aloud or silently, recite the rosary, or informally discuss religion with classmates. Students may speak to, challenge and debate their peers about religious topics just as they do with regard to political topics. However, a student may not engage in speech that constitutes harassment, violates another student's rights, interferes with academic instruction, or disrupts the respectful atmosphere of the school. School officials shall prohibit such speech and behavior when reasonably necessary to maintain order in the school or to protect the rights of other students.

2. During instructional time, students may express their ideas so long as their expression is consistent with the subject matter being taught. However, students may not use the classroom to deliver a religious sermon to their classmates under the guise of an oral report or assignment. Similarly, the extent to which students may incorporate religion into their class assignments depends on the subject matter of the assignment. Students may write papers on religion, give oral presentations on religion, and create art with religious themes if religion is a substantively relevant topic. Teachers should consider religion to be a relevant topic when the subject matter of the assignment is broad or non-specific.

B. Requests to Excuse Students with Objections to Subject Matter Being Taught

1. If participation in a particular activity would cause a student to violate a sincerely held religious belief, the parents or guardians of the student may make a request to excuse the student from that activity. The initial request shall be directed to the student's teacher and must include a clear statement of the reason for the requested

excusal. A teacher receiving such a request will review it within a reasonable time frame and utilize good faith efforts to accommodate the request which may include granting the requested excusal.

2. If a teacher is unable to accommodate a particular request, the parent or guardian of the student may make a written request to the Executive Director restating the reason for the requested excusal and proposing an alternative instructional plan (if applicable) at least two (2) weeks prior to the start of the unit, text or lesson in question.
3. Great Oaks Academy will not provide alternative curriculum in connection with a request for excusal, and will not cover any costs associated with alternative curriculum or instruction. If an alternative curriculum or instruction is proposed, it must be of comparable rigor and meet comparable academic goals of the unit, text or lesson it replaces. Any alternative curriculum or instruction must be approved by applicable school personnel before instruction begins.
4. Excusal from a unit, text or lesson may not necessarily excuse a student from assessment of a required standard or content item. Missed classes may impact the students grade if required information is missing.

C. Religious Release Time: Excusing Students from School for Religious Instruction

At the request of a parent or guardian, a student shall be excused from school for a maximum of three aggregate hours per week in order to receive religious instruction conducted by a church, association of churches, or Sunday school association incorporated under Minnesota law. Minn. Stat. § 120.101, subd. 9(3). The religious instruction shall be conducted in a place other than a public school building, and shall not be conducted at public expense. Great Oaks Academy shall not encourage or discourage participation in such programs.

D. Excusing Students for Observance of Religious Holidays

Missing school for the observance of a religious holiday shall be considered an excused absence so long as the parent or guardian of the student follows policy regarding requesting an excused absence.

IV. Student Religious Garbs and Dress Codes.

Great Oaks Academy's Uniform Policy allows for full or partial exemptions if a student's religious observation which would be substantially hindered by compliance with the Uniform Policy.

V. Vaccination Requirements

Great Oaks Academy shall not require a minor student to be vaccinated if a notarized statement, signed by the student's parent or guardian, is received stating that the student has not been vaccinated because of the conscientiously held beliefs of the parent or guardian.

VI. Faculty Rights and Responsibility Regarding Religion in Schools

A. Religious Discussion in School

Great Oaks Academy employees shall not use their positions of influence over the student body to convince or coerce any student into participation of a particular religion. Employees' privately- held religious beliefs should be practiced and discussed outside of the presence of students. Teachers may, however, answer direct questions from students about their beliefs, so long as they are capable of doing so in a respectful and non-proselytizing manner.

B. Employee Dress Code

In accordance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Great Oaks Academy permits its employees to follow religious dress and grooming practices, including the wearing of a Christian cross, a Muslim hijab, a Sikh turban or a Jewish Kippah as well as shaving or hair length observances such as a Sikh uncut hair and beard or Jewish Pe'ot. The school will respect the observation of a religious prohibition against wearing certain garments (e.g., a Muslim, Pentecostal Christian, or Orthodox Jewish women's practice of wearing modest clothing, and of not wearing pants or short skirts).

Great Oaks Academy will consider exemptions to its standard code of dress on religious grounds on a case by case basis, and may bar an employee's religious dress based on workplace safety, security, or health concerns only if the circumstances actually pose an undue hardship on the school. When an exception is made as a religious accommodation, Great Oaks Academy may still refuse to allow exceptions sought by other employees for secular reasons.

C. Classroom Displays

Employees may not display scriptures or other religious symbols in class, unless the symbol is used as a legitimate teaching aid or resource as part of a course teaching about religion. Employees may not distribute religious material that is not being used as a text to teach about religion.

D. Moments of Silence

Great Oaks Academy may require teachers and students to observe a moment of silence. (Minn. Stat. § 126.091). This moment is intended as a time of respectful reflection. Silent prayer by teachers and students during this time is permitted but shall be neither encouraged nor discouraged.

E. Employee Absence for Observance of Religious Holidays

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act provides that employers, a term which includes school boards, must reasonably accommodate the religious observances of employees. An employer may offer an employee any reasonable accommodation, even though other available means of accommodation may be less onerous to the employee. This means that Great Oaks Academy may refuse to grant paid leave to observe religious holidays, but it must allow employees to use their personal days for religiously motivated absences.

VII. Religious Influence in Instruction

A. Teaching About Religion

A complete study of the history of civilization, literature, art, or music requires some understanding about religion, therefore Great Oaks Academy will not shy away from teaching about world religions and will encourage discussion regarding religion. However, any course that teaches about religion shall be devoid of denominational bias and shall be taught objectively as part of a secular program of education.

B. Music

The selection of music, for performance or other form of study, shall be based primarily on the potential to cultivate musical knowledge, understanding, skills, growth, and appreciation in students, as well as its alignment with the period of history being studied. Both religious and secular music may be studied and performed.

C. Art

The selection of art and artists to be studied shall be based primarily on the works' alignment with the period of history being studied, its technical or stylistic elements, and its impact on or use as an example of the culture of the time period. Artwork will be presented in an objective, nonsectarian manner.

D. History

1. Any comprehensive study of history will necessarily include the study of different religions and belief systems.

2. The selection of art and artists to be studied shall be based primarily on the religions in its history curriculum as a vital part of that program. Different religions will be presented in an accurate, non-biased way and while instruction on religious practices may be included, students will not be asked to participate in any religious practices or observances as part of the curriculum..

E. Literature

Great Oaks Academy may include the use of 'religious literature' as part of a comprehensive study of literature throughout history. This literature may include stories and myths from the Bible, Koran, or Torah, as well as traditional pagan stories and myths from cultures across the world.The purpose of this inclusion shall be exposure to a variety of cultures and belief systems and not the presentation of any one faith (or non-faith) as superior to the others.

F. Teaching Evolution and Creationism

1. Great Oaks Academy may require its biology teachers to teach students about evolution, because it is a scientific theory, not a religious belief. Questions about religious beliefs regarding the origins of our world, such as, "Is there scientific evidence for intelligent design?" may be discussed critically, however, no particular religious belief may be endorsed by a teacher of Great Oaks Academy.
2. Teachers may teach about the different beliefs of human origin as part of a history or anthropology course, provided that religious beliefs are identified as such.

G. Teaching Values

Great Oaks Academy employees will actively teach civic values and virtue. The mere fact that some values are held by certain religions does not mean that those values cannot be taught in school.

H. Religious Literature in the School Library

School libraries may contain significant religious literature, including scriptures, provided that no one faith tradition's literature is favored, and that the library as a whole does not show and preference for religious works.

I. Removing Religious and Anti-Religious Books from Curriculum or from Library

The Great Oaks Academy Board is constrained by the First Amendment in deciding whether to remove a book from the library. The Board shall not seek to prescribe what is orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of expression. Accordingly, the Board shall not remove a book from a list of suggested readings or from the library solely because the book criticizes religion, advances a religious belief with which the Board disagrees, or contains ideas which the Board dislikes. However, the Board may remove a book that is vulgar, obscene, or otherwise educationally unsuitable.

J. Observing Holidays with Both a Religious and a Secular Basis

Teachers at Great Oaks Academy may teach about religious holidays, and may celebrate the non-religious aspects of a religious holiday. Neither teachers nor school officials, however, shall observe the holidays as religious events. Religious symbols (including a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, Christmas tree, nativity scene, and symbols of Native American religions) may be used as a teaching aid or resource, provided that they are displayed as a part of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and that the display is temporary in nature.

VIII. Clubs and Events

A. Religion in Musicals, Concerts, Plays and Exhibits.

1. Performances generally may not incorporate religious readings or dramatization of religious stories but may include a sampling of stories, songs or artworks from a variety of religions. The total effect of any program shall be secular.
2. Music programs, concerts, plays and art exhibits presented at times close to religious holidays shall be representative of the students' work for the quarter.

B. Prayer at School Functions and School Sponsored Events.

In general, no person may initiate a prayer as part of a regular school function or school sponsored event, such as an assembly, athletic event or pre-game ceremony. However, the Board shall consider a request for student-led prayers at graduation or other ceremonies on a case by case basis in consultation with legal counsel. School officials may not in any way organize a religious ceremony that is sponsored by the school.

C. Student Access to School Grounds and Facilities for Religion Clubs

Great Oaks Academy shall treat religious clubs as it treats any other non-curriculum related student group with regards to use of its facilities. However, the school shall not sponsor a religious club and school employees may not play an active role in their meetings. School employees may attend the meetings to provide supervision and maintain order.

D. Use of School Facilities by Outside Religious Groups

Great Oaks Academy shall treat outside religious groups as it treats any other outside group with regards to use of its facilities for meetings. Great Oaks Academy will not discriminate against a community group simply because the group desires to express a religious viewpoint on a particular subject. Granting use of its facilities to a religious group shall not be construed as sponsorship or endorsement of said group's views.

IX. Religious Leaders Meeting with Students at School

A. Community religious leaders (rabbis, clergy, imams, etc.) may use and be present on school property to the same extent as other adults in the community.

B. Community religious leaders may not provide religious instruction to students on school property during regular school hours, meaning from the time school officially begins in the morning until the last scheduled class ends. However, religious groups led by an adult volunteer or community religious leader may meet and discuss religion on school property after school hours, provided that such use is consistent with this policy regarding use of its facilities.

C. Great Oaks Academy may invite community religious leaders with the necessary skill sets to be present on school property to provide grief counseling or other forms of community support.

Legal References:
Minn. Stat. Ch. 121A.10 (Moments of Silence)
Minn. Stat. Ch. 120A.35 (Absence from School for Religious Observance)