

YOUNG SCHOLARS CHARTER SCHOOL

The following guidelines relative to the implementation of Board Policy Statement regarding Religion in the public schools are based on: Section 9524 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ("ESEA") of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) enacted on December 10, 2015, the United States Department of Education publication "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools," dated February 7, 2003, 22 Pa. Code § 4.4(d)(3), 22 Pa. Code § 11.7, and 22 Pa. Code § 11.21

I. STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Prayer

Students have the right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day. Students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray before tests. Student individual or group prayer and discussions regarding religion may not be disruptive to other students. Such activities may not be used to coerce or harass other students.

Students who wish to pray during instructional time will be excused from instruction only with the written request of the parent or guardian. Written requests should outline the time, duration, and frequency of such excusals. Students will not be excused from instruction without written request. Such excusals should not create or impose material burdens on other students. Students will be responsible for assignments and examinations missed during instructional time as a result of such prayer.

Students also may participate in before- and after-school events with religious content, on the same terms as they participate in other non-curriculum activities on school premises. School officials may neither encourage nor discourage participation in such events.

B. Student Assignments

Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, art work, and other written and oral assignments such as book reports. Such homework and class work will be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance. Teachers may not reject or correct such work simply because it includes a religious symbol or addresses a religious theme.

C. Student Speech

Students have the right to speak about religious topics, just as they do with regard to political topics. This right will be terminated if it turns into religious harassment aimed at an individual or at a group of people.

II. EXCUSALS FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS

Students will be excused from lessons or activities which they and their parents find objectionable for religious reasons. Alternative assignments will be substituted.

III. RELEASE TIME

Students will be dismissed to off premises for religious instruction with the approval of the parent or guardian in an amount not to exceed 36 hours per school year. Religious instruction by outsiders on school premises during the school day is not permitted.

IV. STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Student absences to observe religious holidays are “excused.” Students will complete assignments or examinations missed as a result of those absences.

V. TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

The Young Scholars Charter School recognizes the importance of religion in history and its role in shaping contemporary society. The School will teach about religion and religious holidays through its prescribed courses of study. It is important to distinguish the difference between teaching about religion and religious indoctrination. The School’s approach to religion in its schools is purely academic. The School may educate its students about all religions but may not promote or denigrate any religion. It is the School’s goal to strive for student awareness of religions but never to press for student acceptance of any religion, viewpoint, or belief. The School promotes solely the study of religion, never the practice of religion.

As such, teachers, administrators, and classroom aides shall maintain a climate of “neutrality” at all times within the classroom and shall be sensitive to recognize differing religions represented by the students of this School. Students may not use a religion class as a forum to proselytize others.

VI. MOMENTS OF SILENCE

If the School is recognizing a “moment of silence” during the school day, students may pray silently on an individual basis or choose not to pray during this period of time. Students are not permitted to pray out loud or within a group during a “moment of silence” during the school day.