

## **Early College Academy**

### **Religion and Prayer**

The First Amendment protects against the establishment of religion. No instructional activities shall advance or inhibit any particular religion or religion generally. Additionally, no devotional exercises or displays of a religious character will be permitted in Early College Academy in the conduct of any program or activity under the jurisdiction of the School or the Governing Authority.

#### Religious Expression in Academics

Early College Academy recognizes that religion and religious themes are common throughout education. An education without referring to these themes would be incomplete and detrimental to living in a pluralistic society. The materials and curriculum approved by Early College Academy may contain religious references or themes, and teachers may discuss these religious references and themes as appropriate. Such materials, teaching, and discussion are appropriate provided they pertain to the subject matter and are neutral, unbiased, do not promote or inhibit religion, and do not imply that religious doctrines have the support of School authority.

Religious expression in the completion of homework, artwork, or other written or oral assignments is permitted. Assignment grades and scores shall be calculated using ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, including any legitimate pedagogical concerns, and shall not penalize or reward a student based on the religious content of a student's work.

#### Student Religious Expression and Access to School Facilities

The First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion. Accordingly, no student shall be prohibited from exercising a voluntary expression of the student's religious beliefs through prayer or silent meditation. Students, however, are not exempt from attending a required course because the course or instruction interferes with the student's free exercise of religion. No policy of Early College Academy prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in the School.

Students enrolled in Early College Academy may engage in religious expression before, during, and after school hours in the same manner and to the same extent that a student is permitted to engage in secular activities or expression before, during, and after school hours. "Religious expression" includes any of the following: (1) prayer; (2) religious gatherings, including but not limited to prayer groups, religious clubs, "see you at the pole" gatherings, or other religious gatherings; (3) distribution of written materials or literature of a religious nature; (4) any other activity of a religious nature, including wearing symbolic clothing or expression of a religious viewpoint, provided that the activity is not obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd, indecent, or

substantially disrupts or materially interferes with the work and discipline of Early College Academy.

Students enrolled in Early College Academy who wish to conduct a meeting for the purpose of engaging in religious expression will have the same access to school facilities as is given to secular student groups, without regard to the content of a student's or group's expression. During instructional hours, Early College Academy prohibits the School's facilities from being used by non-school sponsored clubs or activities or school-sponsored, non-curriculum-related clubs and activities. (See Policy **4650**.)

The director of education and workforce shall provide each district with a nonexhaustive list of major religious holidays or festivals for the next two school years, including Eid, Good Friday, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, at the beginning of each school year. Each district may adopt the director's list in its entirety or choose which holidays to include on its list.

This policy shall permit a student in any of grades kindergarten through twelve to be absent for up to three religious expression days each school year to take holidays for reasons of faith or religious or spiritual belief system or participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or other religious or spiritual organization. The district shall not impose an academic penalty as a result of a student being absent as permitted in the policy. The policy shall also permit students to participate in interscholastic athletics or other extracurricular activities on days in which the student was otherwise absent for a religious expression day.

*Federal:* 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 20 U.S.C. 7904(b).

*Ohio:* R.C. 3320.01, 3320.02, 3320.03, 3320.04

