

**2025-2026**

# **Religious Diversity Guidelines**

**in Montgomery County Public Schools**



## **VALUES**

*Learning  
Respect  
Relationships  
Excellence  
Equity*

## **VISION**

### ***Future Ready***

*All students will graduate ready to thrive in a changing world—with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to lead, adapt, and make a positive impact in their communities and beyond..*

## **MISSION**

### ***To Unleash Potential***

*All students will receive a solid academic foundation, grounded in strong critical thinking skills, with opportunities to enhance and enrich their learning. All students will develop resilience, be adaptable, and have a lifelong passion for learning. All students will become effective communicators and collaborators predicated on meaningful relationships. All students will make a positive impact in their community and be ready for success in their personal and professional life.*

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# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

## CRISIS HOTLINES

24-hour information, Referrals, and Supportive Conversation

### Montgomery County Crisis

Hotline/EveryMind/ . . . . . 988  
and <https://www.every-mind.org/>

Provides a staffed hotline as well as a 24-hour chat box on their website.

### Montgomery County Crisis Center. . . . . 240-777-4000

The Crisis Center provides free crisis support services 24/7 for individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis.

### Trevor Project. . . . . 866-488-7386; Text 678 678

### Youth Crisis Hotline of

Montgomery County. . . . . 988

Provides confidential and anonymous support by trained counselors through a 24-hour telephone active listening and referral service.

## TO REPORT SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS

### MCPS Division of Safety and

Emergency Management . . . . . 240-740-3066

The MCPS office responsible for ensuring the safety of MCPS schools and offices.

### MCPS Student Conduct and Appeals [SCA@mcpsmd.org](mailto:SCA@mcpsmd.org) or

[TitleIX@mcpsmd.org](mailto:TitleIX@mcpsmd.org) . . . . . 240-740-3215

The MCPS districtwide Title IX coordinator and districtwide child abuse and neglect contact. The Student Conduct and Appeals (SCA) web page is at [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/compliance/](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/compliance/). SCA works collaboratively with schools, the Division of Legal Services and other MCPS offices, and community agencies to ensure consistency and coherence with implementation of policies, regulations, and guidelines, such as issues related to human relations; bullying, harassment (including Title IX sexual harassment), and intimidation; recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect; incidents of hate-bias, hazing, and student gender identity.

### MCPS Cyber Safety dropbox: . . . [CyberSafety@mcpsmd.org](mailto:CyberSafety@mcpsmd.org)

Dropbox to report inappropriate online activity within MCPS.

### The Cyber Tipline . . . . . 1-800-843-5678

A 24/7 hotline to report suspected online enticement of children for sexual acts, extra-familial child sexual molestation, child pornography, child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, unsolicited obscene materials sent to a child, misleading domain names, and misleading words or digital images on the Internet.

### Safe Schools Maryland Hotline . . . . . 833-MD-B-Safe (833-632-7233)

A 24/7 anonymous and free reporting system available to students, teachers, school staff members, parents, and the general public to report any school or student safety concerns, including mental health concerns. Information about incidents is shared with the appropriate offices at Montgomery County Public Schools, respecting anonymity of the caller.

### Montgomery County Child Protective Services, Department of Health and Human Services

(24 hours) . . . . . 240-777-4417 or 240-777-4815 TTY

A 24/7 reporting hotline to report suspected child abuse or neglect to Montgomery County Child Protective Services.

### Montgomery County Adult Protective Services for

Vulnerable Adults . . . 240-777-3000, 240-777-4815 TTY

A 24/7 hotline to report suspected adult abuse and neglect.

### Montgomery County Police Department, Special Victims

Investigation Division (24 hours) . . . . . 240-773-5400

A 24/7 hotline to report sex crimes against children and adults, physical child abuse, runaways, missing children, felony domestic violence, elder abuse/vulnerable adult abuse, and registration violations of sex offenders to Montgomery County Police Department.

### Montgomery County Police:

Drug and Gang Tip Hotline. . . . . 240-773-GANG (4264) or

240-773-DRUG (3784)

A 24/7 hotline to leave an anonymous tip with information relating to illegal drug/gang activities in Montgomery County.

## MCPS RESOURCES

### Countywide Student Government

[www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/  
student-leadership](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/student-leadership)

### Director, Student Leadership Activities . . . . 240-740-3977

### Student Member of the Board

[www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/members/student.aspx](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/members/student.aspx)

### Office of the Board of Education . . . . . 240-740-3030

### Chief of the Division of School Leadership

and Improvement . . . . . 240-740-3100

### Division of Specialized Support Services . . . 240-740-5630

### Section 504 Coordinator . . . . . 240-987-8031

## MONTGOMERY NONEMERGENCY RESOURCES

### Montgomery County Police

Nonemergency Line . . . . . 301-279-8000

### Montgomery County Health and Human Services

#### Information Line

Contact the Department of Health and Human Services

General Information . . . . . 311, 301-251-4850 TTY

Outside Montgomery County Residents. . . 240-777-0311

## MCPS INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Stay Connected to MCPS . [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org)

For systemwide information and emergency announcements:

MCPS on Twitter . . . . . [www.twitter.com/mcps](http://www.twitter.com/mcps)

MCPS en Español. . . . . [www.twitter.com/mcpsespanol](http://www.twitter.com/mcpsespanol)

MCPS on Facebook . . . . . [www.facebook.com/mcpsmd](http://www.facebook.com/mcpsmd)

MCPS en Español. . . . . [www.facebook.com/mcpsespanol](http://www.facebook.com/mcpsespanol)

Alert MCPS. . [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/alertMCPS](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/alertMCPS)



## MCPS INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)

MCPS QuickNotes Email Messages  
and Newsletter . . . . . [www.mcpsQuickNotes.org](http://www.mcpsQuickNotes.org)

### Ask MCPS Information Service

Telephone . . . . . 240-740-3000  
Spanish Hotline . . . . . 240-740-2845  
Email. . . . . [AskMCPS@mcpsmd.org](mailto:AskMCPS@mcpsmd.org)

### MCPS Public Information Office . . . . . 240-740-2837

MCPS Television . . . . . [www.mcpsTV.org](http://www.mcpsTV.org);  
Comcast 34, 998; RCN 89, 1058; Verizon 36

Recorded Emergency and  
Weather Information. . . . . 301-279-3673

## MCPS RESOURCES ON THE WEB [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org)

### Search:

MCPS School Directory  
MCPS Staff Directory  
MCPS Strategic Plan  
Athletics  
Be Well 365  
Board of Education  
Bullying, Harassment, and Intimidation  
Bus Routes  
Child Abuse and Neglect  
College and Career Center  
Common Sense Education  
Course Bulletin  
Cybercivility and CyberSafety  
Diploma Requirements  
Gangs and Gang Activity

## MCPS RESOURCES ON THE WEB (CONTINUED) [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org)

Grading and Reporting  
Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity  
Guidelines for Student Gender Identity  
Lunch Menus  
Maryland High School Assessments  
Nondiscrimination  
Online Pathway to Graduation  
Physical Education  
Policies and Regulations  
Psychological Services  
Pupil Personnel Services  
Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect  
Restorative Justice  
School Counseling Services  
School Health Services  
School Safety  
Sexual Harassment  
Social Media Digital Citizenship  
Special Education  
Special Programs  
Strategic Planning  
Student Code of Conduct  
Student eLearning  
Student Privacy  
Student Service Learning  
Suicide Prevention  
Summer School

# INTRODUCTION

## Respecting Religious Diversity in Montgomery County Public Schools

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is committed to providing all students with opportunities to succeed and thrive. Part of that commitment is making sure our students have the right to express their religious or nonreligious beliefs and practices, free from discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Our nation and the state of Maryland have a deep and long-standing commitment both to the protection of religious liberty and to the separation of church and state. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” This means that the government may not promote one religion over another, prefer religion over nonreligion, or express hostility or opposition to religion.

The U.S. Supreme Court has emphasized the importance of neutrality toward religion by public schools. Schools must protect the religious liberty rights of all students, while rejecting public endorsement of religion. Schools may neither inculcate nor inhibit religion, and students have a right to an academic environment where religious beliefs are not advocated in courses or in school-sponsored activities, such as commencements or assemblies. Equally important, students have the right to their religious or nonreligious beliefs and practices, free from discrimination, bullying, or harassment, and MCPS is committed to making reasonable accommodations for those beliefs and practices.

These guidelines are intended to provide a quick reference regarding several Montgomery County Board of Education policies and MCPS regulations, as well as state and federal laws, which guide the district on these topics. These guidelines put all of this information together in one place and answer frequently asked questions about religious guidelines for students, while in school and during school-sponsored activities, so that the expectations are clear to our staff, our students, our families, and our community. This document encompasses essential areas, including:

**Absences:** Guidelines and procedures regarding absences for religious observances, ensuring that students can practice their faith without detriment to their academic progress.

**Prayer and Religious Dress:** Policies and accommodations regarding prayer and religious attire, allowing students to express their religious beliefs in a respectful manner.

**Religion in Instruction:** Approaches and guidelines for integrating religion in instructional materials, fostering understanding and respect for various faiths within our curriculum.

**Food and Religious Observance:** Considerations and options for accommodating dietary restrictions and providing suitable meal options to honor religious observances.

**Extracurricular Activities:** Ensuring inclusivity and reasonable accommodations for religious practices during extracurricular activities, allowing all students to participate fully.

**Fostering a Culture of Respect for All People:** Strategies and initiatives aimed at cultivating a culture of respect, empathy, and appreciation for the diverse backgrounds and beliefs represented within our school community.

Please note that these guidelines are subject to change between editions of this publication, and any changes supersede the statements and references contained in this publication.

MCPS created these guidelines in collaboration with the Montgomery County Executive’s Faith Community Working Group and other stakeholders. This collaboration seeks to promote respect and appreciation for the religious beliefs of our diverse student population. These guidelines seek to foster a culture where all families feel respected and deepen our commitment to our core values of Learning, Relationships, Respect, Excellence, and Equity. MCPS believes that diversity is one of our greatest strengths and should enrich our community as we learn together in our schools.

We hope you find these guidelines helpful. If you have questions about anything in this handbook, please first talk with your school administrators. If you have further questions, contact the MCPS Division of Family and Community Engagement at 240-740-3165 or [Elba\\_M\\_Garcia@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Elba_M_Garcia@mcpsmd.org).

If your questions cannot be answered by MCPS staff, you also may contact the Board of Education at 240-740-3030 or [BOE@mcpsmd.org](mailto:BOE@mcpsmd.org).

## ■ Frequently Asked Questions

### **Are students' absences excused for observances of religious holidays?**

YES. Families must follow all of the regular procedures to report and document absences. Please see the *Absences for Religious Holidays* section of these guidelines for further information (page 2).

### **Can students make up work due to absences for religious holidays?**

YES. Families should work with their child's school to arrange for making up work. Please see the *Absences for Religious Holidays* section of these guidelines for more detailed information (page 2).

### **Can students pray during the school day?**

YES, under certain circumstances. Please see the *Prayer and Religious Dress* section of these guidelines for more specific information (page 3).

### **Can students wear clothing associated with their religion?**

YES. Students may wear scarves, hijabs, yarmulkes, patkas, kufis, or other clothing associated with their religion in accordance with Board policies and MCPS regulations. Please see the *Prayer and Religious Dress* section of these guidelines for more specific information (page 3).

### **Can religious topics be discussed in school assignments?**

YES. Students may express their religious beliefs or nonbelief in school assignments as long as their expressions meet the assignment's requirements, are relevant to the topic, and follow the other guidelines discussed in this *handbook*. In addition, objective and factual lessons about religion in literature, history, and the arts may be part of the MCPS curriculum. Please see the *Religion in the Instructional Program* section of these guidelines for further information (page 3).

### **Do schools accommodate students' religion-related dietary restrictions?**

YES. Schools regularly work with students who may have religion-related dietary restrictions. Please see the *Food and Religious Observance* section of these guidelines for more information (page 5).

### **Can students distribute religious informational materials?**

YES. Students may distribute religious materials on the same terms as they are permitted to distribute other informational material unrelated to school activities. Students must follow school rules about where, when, and how materials are distributed. Please see the *Distributing Religious Informational Materials* section of these guidelines for more information (page 5).

### **Are religious extracurricular clubs allowed in schools?**

YES. Students have a right to organize religion-related extracurricular clubs or assemble and conduct religious meetings, prayer groups, or other observances of religious practices during noninstructional time, on the same basis as other extracurricular student groups that are not related directly to a subject taught in school. These religion-related extracurricular meetings or clubs must be student led. For more information and specific guidance, please see the *Extracurricular Student Religious Activities* section of these guidelines (page 6).

## ■ Absences for Religious Holidays

### **Attendance and Absences for Observance of Religious Holidays**

Daily attendance at school is crucial to student achievement. Nevertheless, MCPS understands that students may occasionally miss school for a variety of reasons, including the observance of religious holidays.

MCPS will accommodate reasonable requests for late arrivals or early dismissals related to the observance of a religious holiday, but they must be authorized by a parent/guardian.

Although participation in any athletic event or practice generally requires athletes to attend all of their scheduled classes on the day of the event or practice, students who have prescheduled activities, such as the observance of a religious holiday, will be permitted to participate in athletic events or practices on the day of the absence, provided they receive advance approval from their school.

Because free exercise of religion is a constitutional right, MCPS schools that have perfect attendance awards may not withhold these awards from students whose only absences have been excused for the observance of religious holidays.

#### **References:**

MCPS Regulation JEA-RA, *Student Attendance*.

### **Making Up Work After an Absence for Observing Religious Holidays**

As a reference for staff, students, parents/guardians, and community members, the calendar on the MCPS website will display the Days of Commemoration, including certain holidays relating to the religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage of county residents, in addition to MCPS school closure information. The calendar is available at [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/calendars](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/calendars).

When a student will be absent for a religious observance, students and their parents/guardians are encouraged to notify the student's teacher(s) in advance for making up classwork and homework. While each situation must be

addressed on a case-by-case basis, students typically will be eligible for an extension of up to three school days to make up work after an excused absence for observance of a religious holiday. After an excused absence for a religious observance, students may only be required to make up homework designed to evaluate the student's mastery of content, such as assessments, papers, projects, quizzes or tests. The student is excused from making up homework or classwork given for the purpose of practice or preparation for instruction.

When assigning homework, schools should be mindful of religious, cultural, ethnic, and other Days of Commemoration that are important to members of our community.

## ■ Prayer and Religious Dress

### Prayer at School

Students are free to pray and discuss their religious views with other students, as long as these activities are voluntary, student initiated, and do not materially disrupt or infringe on classroom instruction, other school activities, or the rights of others. For example, a student may say a prayer or read religious texts in informal settings, such as cafeterias or hallways, to the same extent that students are permitted to engage in nonreligious activities; or a student athlete may pray before a competition or after scoring as it does not unreasonably delay or disrupt the competition or interfere with the rights of other athletes or spectators. While students may exercise their right to pray during the school day or at school-related activities, they may not compel, harass, or pressure others at school to participate in or listen to a prayer, sermon, or other religious activity. For instance, student-led prayers broadcast to all classes over the school's public announcement system would not be permissible.

If a student requests a quiet place to pray, schools will make a reasonable effort to accommodate the request, provided that space is available, there is appropriate staff monitoring to ensure student safety, and the educational process is not disrupted. This could mean a quiet space in the media center, an empty classroom, or other room.

Students and their parents/guardians should expect that MCPS teachers, administrators, and other staff will not organize, lead, initiate, endorse, or actively participate in student prayers or other student religious activities during school hours or at school-sponsored events. MCPS staff may be present during student prayers or other student-led religious activities only for purposes of monitoring and providing oversight to ensure student and school safety.

## Religious Dress

All students have a responsibility to be dressed and groomed for school, in accordance with community standards for dress and grooming and in a manner that is not disruptive to or preclude their participation in the learning environment or school activities. These requirements are set forth in MCPS Regulation JFA-RA, *Student Rights and Responsibilities*. Students are permitted to wear clothing or jewelry associated with their religion, scarves, hijabs, yarmulkes, patkas, or other containing religious messages, as long as their style of dress is consistent with the requirements of Regulation JFA-RA, which include the following. Students' clothing may not—

- endanger or potentially threatens the health and/or safety of self or others;
- fail to meet a reasonable requirement of a course or activity;
- be associated with gangs;
- be lewd, vulgar, or obscene; or
- promote sexual activity, smoking, or tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs prohibited on MCPS property as referenced in MCPS Regulation IGO-RA, *Guidelines for Incidents of Alcohol, Cannabis, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use Involving Students*, or
- be discriminatory as set forth in Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*.

When possible, schools should provide reasonable accommodations to students if they (or their parents/guardians on their behalf) request permission to wear or not wear certain clothing during physical education class or school-sponsored activities that they perceive as inconsistent with their religious beliefs, such as modesty requirements. Such accommodations do not preclude a student's participation in an activity. For example, the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletics Association allows athletes participating in interscholastic competitions to "wear a head covering, wrap, or other required religious garment which is not abrasive, hard, or dangerous to any player/others, and is attached in such a way that it is unlikely to come off during play." For other questions regarding athletic accommodations, please consult your school athletic specialist or the MCPS Department of Athletics.

## ■ Religion in the Instructional Program

### Religion in School Assignments

Students are free to express religious beliefs or nonbelief in school assignments as long as their expressions are relevant to the topic and meet the requirements of the assignment. In the evaluation of school assignments, teachers will not discriminate based on the religious content of students' submissions. Schoolwork will

be judged by ordinary academic standards and other legitimate educational interests. For example, if an assignment involves writing a poem, the work of a student who submits a poem in the form of a prayer (such as a psalm or a piyyut) will be evaluated based on academic standards (such as literary quality) and neither penalized nor rewarded based on the poem's religious content.

## **Requests to be Excused from Noncurricular Activities for Religious Reasons**

Students may be excused from core curriculum instruction when it is based upon texts and textbooks that substantially interfere with their sincerely held religious beliefs. Parents and guardians may submit these requests in accordance with MCPS regulation IFD-RA, Curriculum Transparency and Requests to Be Excused from Instruction by completing and submitting [MCPS Form 281-26](#) within the first ten (10) days of each marking period, identifying the specific texts they would like the student to be excused from.

Students may also be excused from noncurricular activities, such as classroom parties or free-time events that involve materials or practices in conflict with a family's religious, and/or other, practices.

## **Teaching About Religion or Religious Holidays in Schools**

MCPS believes that schools should develop a climate in which children can learn and appreciate cultures and heritages different from their own. To this end, the MCPS curriculum recognizes the role of religions in literature, history, the humanities, and the arts. The MCPS curriculum also builds students' understanding of the relationship between government and religious freedom. Students may attend elective classes, when available, on the history or comparative study of religions in which aspects of religion are discussed.

When students are taught about religion, they should expect instructional activities to be fair, objective, and not demean any religious or nonreligious beliefs. Respecting students' differing beliefs is an essential element of a pluralistic society. Classroom presentations by teachers, students, and guest speakers should not proselytize or advocate particular religious viewpoints as superior to other religious or nonreligious viewpoints. Students may or may not choose to share their ideas about religious traditions. Students should expect that they will not be asked to be spokespersons or representatives for their religious traditions. Singling out students in this way may make them feel uncomfortable, and one student's religious experience should never be generalized to an entire group.

As a teaching aid or resource, schools may use religious symbols in the classroom as examples of religious or cultural heritage. But these teaching aids or resources may be displayed only on a short-term basis to accompany appropriate classroom instruction.

As part of the educational program, schools may teach about religious holidays in a factual manner. School activities may feature the secular aspects of a holiday, but holiday activities may not involve participation in a religious practice or event. Students of various faiths, or their parents/guardians, may ask for students to be excused from certain holiday activities. Teachers should work to honor these requests by planning an alternate activity for students who request one. Even birthdays or other occasions that many may consider to be secular, such as Halloween and Valentine's Day, may be viewed by others as having religious overtones. Schools are permitted to have activities around these events—as long as they are secular in nature—and may excuse students who do not want to participate.

## **Religion in School Assemblies and Concerts**

Special school events, assemblies, concerts, and programs must be designed to further a secular and objective program of education and must not focus on any one religion or religious observance. For instance, religious music may be performed at a winter concert as long as the total effect of the program is nonreligious, and secular music is also included as part of a balanced and inclusive approach.

In handling requests for accommodations, school staff should consult with the students and their parents/guardians and take care to avoid embarrassment to, or coercion of, students.

Student or guest speakers at assemblies should be selected based on neutral and even-handed criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion. Schools should make appropriate, neutral disclaimers to avoid conveying the perception to other students, their parents/guardians, or guests that the school endorses the student's or guest speaker's viewpoints (whether religious or not). In addition, parents/guardians should expect that age will be a factor in schools' programming for assemblies and other school events involving religion-related topics or holidays. While high school students may understand that a school does not endorse the viewpoints of students or guests who are selected on an even-handed basis to speak, middle and elementary students are less likely to make this distinction, even if school staff provide appropriate disclaimers.

## ■ Food and Religious Observance

### Religion-related Dietary Restrictions and Fasting

Students, or their parents/guardians, may request schools to make reasonable and feasible accommodations for a student's dietary needs, including religion-related dietary restrictions and fasting. The MCPS Division of Food and Nutrition Services helps students who have certain dietary restrictions by labeling foods and/or offering a variety of choices for breakfast, lunch, and snacks, such as pork-free options; but schools are not required to prepare special foods solely to fulfill a student's particular religious requirements. For more information, visit [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/food-and-nutrition/](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/food-and-nutrition/).

Similarly, students who are fasting for religious reasons may be permitted to go to the media center or another separate area, rather than the cafeteria, during lunchtime, provided there is appropriate staff supervision. In addition, students who are fasting for religious reasons and ask to be excused from strenuous activities during physical education class should be provided reasonable accommodations. Students should bring to school a note from a parent/guardian providing a written explanation identifying the requested fasting-related accommodation.

## ■ Distributing Religious Informational Materials

### Student Requests to Distribute Religion-related Informational Materials

Students may distribute religion-related informational materials to their schoolmates on the same terms as other non-school-sponsored groups are permitted to distribute informational material. This means that schools can specify at what time the distribution may occur, where it may occur, and how it may occur, as long as these time, place, and manner restrictions are applied consistently to all non-school-sponsored informational materials.

These time, place, and manner-of-distribution requirements are reflected in MCPS regulations. Students' distribution of religious informational materials, like political materials or any other non-school-sponsored informational material, should occur only outside of class time and in a nondisruptive manner. For example, schools may permit students to distribute informational materials on sidewalks and in the cafeteria, designated hallways, or student government rooms or areas. However, students may not distribute non-school-sponsored informational materials in classrooms, the media center, or other school rooms during the school day, except (a) when the room is

being used as a voluntary meeting place or (b) when the informational material is being used in a class as part of the regular teaching program or a voluntary forum or seminar held by students.

As set forth in MCPS Regulation JFA-RA, *Student Rights and Responsibilities*, all students have a responsibility to refrain from speech, including but not limited to verbal or written expression, dress, or portrayal of images or symbols that –

- are obscene, libelous, slanderous, profane, vulgar, or lewd; or
- cause or may reasonably be expected to cause a substantial disruption school or district operations or activities;
- are associated with gangs;
- are discriminatory, as set forth in Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*; or
- promote sexual activity, smoking, tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs prohibited on MCPS property, as referenced in MCPS Regulation IGO-RA, *Guidelines for Incidents of Alcohol, Cannabis, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use Involving Students*.

#### References:

MCPS Regulation JFA-RA, *Student Rights and Responsibilities*  
MCPS Regulation CNA-RA, *Display and Distribution of Informational Materials and Announcements*.  
MCPS Regulation KEA-RA, *Participation in Political Campaigns and Distribution of Campaign Materials*

## ■ Extracurricular Student Religious Activities

### Religion-related Extracurricular Activities and Clubs

Students have a right to organize religion-related extracurricular clubs or assemble and conduct religious meetings, prayer groups, or other observances of religious practices during noninstructional time. These religion-related extracurricular meetings or clubs will be treated the same as other non-school-sponsored activities and must be student led. MCPS staff may provide appropriate monitoring and oversight to ensure student and school safety, but they must not organize, lead, initiate, endorse, or actively participate in prayers or any other religious activities undertaken in these extracurricular meetings or clubs, nor may others not enrolled as students, such as outside adults or religious leaders.

All non-school-sponsored student groups are expected to inform the MCPS administration about any group activities in advance to find an adequate space within the school for these activities. Student religious groups may have access to school facilities, equipment, and services on the same basis as other non-school-sponsored extracurricular student groups. These religion-related

extracurricular groups also may be listed in the section of the school yearbook if the school has a section of the yearbook designated for non-school-sponsored extracurricular student groups.

Non-school-sponsored student religious groups may invite outside adults or religious leaders to attend their meetings on an occasional basis. However, individuals who are not enrolled students at the school may not regularly attend or direct, conduct, control, or lead prayers or other religious activities in student-led extracurricular groups.

Principals retain the authority to place restrictions on student participation in any extracurricular activity, religious or nonreligious, for violations of disciplinary rules, unexcused absences on the day of the activity, or violations of MCPS rules. See also MCPS Regulation JFA-RA, *Student Rights and Responsibilities*, for more information on student rights and responsibilities for conduct that contributes to the goal of maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect.

## **MCPS Use of Facilities Owned by Religious Organizations**

Students and their parents/guardians should expect that schools will not use space in facilities owned or operated by religious organizations for school-related activities or functions when a nonreligious alternative venue is viable and reasonably suitable for the activity or function. Schools will not select or reject the use of any private religious facility based on any facet of religious teachings with which any such facility is associated; instead, religion-neutral criteria will be employed to select these facilities, such as proximity to MCPS, suitability of the facility for the intended use, health and safety, comparative expense, and accessibility.

If a school-sponsored activity or function is held in a facility owned or operated by a religious organization, students and their parents/guardians should expect that the school will clearly identify a secular purpose for using the facility and ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that religious symbols, messages, or artifacts are not displayed in the specific rooms utilized for the school-related activities during their use. Additionally, all reasonable steps will be taken to avoid or minimize exposure to conspicuous religious symbols, messages, or artifacts in areas where participants in the school-related activity or function pass through.

## **■ Relationships with Faith Communities**

MCPS works to maintain and develop a collaborative relationship with faith communities, just as it does with businesses and other community and civic groups.

Students and schools gain a great deal when every part of a community comes together to support education.

Collaboration with any faith community must have a purely secular purpose and neither promote religion nor preclude it. Students will not be selected to participate based on membership in any religious group, or on acceptance or rejection of any religious belief, or on participation in, or refusal to participate in, any religious activity.

Volunteers from faith communities must recognize that the purpose of any collaboration is educational and secular in nature, not religious, and that volunteers must respect the First Amendment rights of students. Volunteers or other representatives of any faith community may not proselytize about their faith to students or engage in any religious worship activity while conducting or participating in a school-sponsored activity. Volunteers and other representatives of faith communities must follow the same MCPS rules for distribution of informational materials as apply to other community organizations.

## **■ Fostering a Culture of Respect for All**

These guidelines have been developed to assist in fostering a culture of respect among everyone in the MCPS community. With great diversity in our community, there is much that we can learn from each other when there is a culture of respect, openness, and tolerance. Our schools work to create supportive and accepting learning environments, and parents/guardians are encouraged to work closely with teachers and administrators to understand their families' needs as they pertain to their religious beliefs and practices.

As part of our efforts to create positive and respectful schools, students have a right to a safe learning environment, free from bullying, harassment, and intimidation of any sort, including intimidation based on the student's actual or perceived personal characteristics, including religion. Further, the Board prohibits the use of language and/or the display of images and symbols that promote hate and can be reasonably expected to cause substantial disruption to school or district operations or activities. Students who are bullied, students who bully, and students who are bystanders to bullying are at risk of a range of negative health, safety, and educational outcomes. MCPS has implemented a systemwide approach designed to prevent bullying, harassment, or intimidation and effectively intervene when it occurs, as well as to deter reprisal and retaliation against individuals who report acts of bullying, harassment, or intimidation. To report any such actions, students or their parents/guardians should work with school administrators to resolve any issues and complete MCPS Form 230-35, *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation*

*Reporting Form*, available via an online reporting form (preferred) and a paper reporting form. [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/forms/detail.aspx?formNumber=230-35&catID=1&subCatId=44](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/forms/detail.aspx?formNumber=230-35&catID=1&subCatId=44)

In alignment with Board Policy COA, *Student Well-being and School Safety*, MCPS has established and maintains a behavior threat assessment process, based on an appraisal of behaviors that provides appropriate preventive or corrective measures to maintain safe and secure school environments and workplaces. All children deserve a safe and nurturing school environment that supports their physical, social, and psychological well-being. Such safe and nurturing environments are essential prerequisites for promoting all students' opportunity to learn. In alignment with Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*, school safety measures should not reinforce biases against, or rely on the profiling of, students based on their actual or perceived personal characteristics. Staff responsible for implementing behavior threat assessment procedures at the school level are trained to understand implicit bias and promote diversity awareness.

**References:**

Board Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*  
Board Policy COA, *Student Well-being and School Safety*  
Board Policy JHF, *Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation*  
MCPS Regulation COA-RA, *Behavior Threat Assessment*.  
MCPS Regulation JHF-RA, *Student Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation*.  
MCPS Regulation IQB-RA, *Extracurricular and Cocurricular Activities*

# MCPS NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) prohibits illegal discrimination based on race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, nationality, religion, immigration status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family structure/parental status, marital status, age, ability (cognitive, social/emotional, and physical), poverty and socioeconomic status, language, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations. Discrimination undermines our community's long-standing efforts to create, foster, and promote equity, inclusion, and acceptance for all. The Board prohibits the use of language and/or the display of images and symbols that promote hate and can be reasonably expected to cause substantial disruption to school or district operations or activities. For more information, please review Montgomery County Board of Education Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*. This Policy affirms the Board's belief that each and every student matters, and in particular, that educational outcomes should never be predictable by any individual's actual or perceived personal characteristics. The Policy also recognizes that equity requires proactive steps to identify and redress implicit biases, practices that have an unjustified disparate impact, and structural and institutional barriers that impede equality of educational or employment opportunities. MCPS also provides equal access to the Boy/Girl Scouts and other designated youth groups.\*

It is the policy of the state of Maryland that all public and publicly funded schools and school programs operate in compliance with:

- (1) Title VI of the federal *Civil Rights Act of 1964*; and
- (2) Title 26, Subtitle 7 of the Education Article of the Maryland Code, which states that public and publicly funded schools and programs may not
  - (a) discriminate against a current student, a prospective student, or the parent or guardian of a current or prospective student on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability;
  - (b) refuse enrollment of a prospective student, expel a current student, or withhold privileges from a current student, a prospective student, or the parent or guardian of a current or prospective student because of an individual's race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability; or
  - (c) discipline, invoke a penalty against, or take any other retaliatory action against a student or parent or guardian of a student who files a complaint alleging that the program or school discriminated against the student, regardless of the outcome of the complaint.\*\*

Please note that contact information and federal, state, or local content requirements may change between editions of this document and shall supersede the statements and references contained in this version. Please see the online version for the most up-to-date information at [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/nondiscrimination](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/nondiscrimination).

For inquiries or complaints about discrimination against MCPS students***	For inquiries or complaints about discrimination against MCPS staff***
Director of Student Compliance and Appeals Division of Equity and Organizational Development 850 Hungerford Drive, Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-3215   SWC@mcpsmd.org	Human Resource Compliance Officer Division of Human Resources and Talent Management Department of Compliance and Investigations 15 West Gude Drive, Suite B400, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-2888   DCI@mcpsmd.org
For student requests for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	For staff requests for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act
Section 504 Coordinator Division of Specialized Support Services, School Counseling Services Unit 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 257, Rockville, MD 20850 240-987-8031   504@mcpsmd.org	ADA Compliance Coordinator Division of Human Resources and Talent Management Department of Compliance and Investigations 15 West Gude Drive, Suite B400, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-2888   DCI@mcpsmd.org
For inquiries or complaints about sex discrimination under Title IX, including sexual harassment, against students or staff***	
Title IX Coordinator Division of Equity and Organizational Development, Student Compliance and Appeals 850 Hungerford Drive, Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-3215   TitleIX@mcpsmd.org	

\*This notification complies with the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as amended.

\*\*This notification complies with the Code of Maryland Regulations Section 13A.01.07.

\*\*\*Discrimination complaints may be filed with other agencies, such as the following: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Baltimore Field Office, GH Fallon Federal Building, 31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 1432, Baltimore, MD 21201, 1-800-669-4000, 1-800-669-6820 (TTY); Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR), William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 Saint Paul Street, Suite 900, Baltimore, MD 21202, 410-767-8600, 1-800-637-6247, [mccr@maryland.gov](mailto:mccr@maryland.gov); Agency Equity Officer, Office of Equity Assurance and Compliance, Office of the Deputy State Superintendent of Operations, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-2595, [oeac.msde@maryland.gov](mailto:oeac.msde@maryland.gov); or U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), 61 Forsyth St. S.W., Suite 19T10, Atlanta, GA 30303, 404-974-9406 and TDD: 800-877-8339, [OCR.Atlanta@ed.gov](mailto:OCR.Atlanta@ed.gov), 1-800-421-3481, 1-800-877-8339 (TDD), [OCR@ed.gov](mailto:OCR@ed.gov), or [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html).

This document is available, upon request, in languages other than English and in an alternate format under the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, by contacting the MCPS Office of Communications at 240-740-2837, 1-800-735-2258 (Maryland Relay), or [PIO@mcpsmd.org](mailto:PIO@mcpsmd.org). Individuals who need sign language interpretation or cued speech transliteration may contact the MCPS Office of Interpreting Services at 240-740-1800, 301-637-2958 (VP) [mcpsinterpretingservices@mcpsmd.org](mailto:mcpsinterpretingservices@mcpsmd.org), or [MCPSInterpretingServices@mcpsmd.org](mailto:MCPSInterpretingServices@mcpsmd.org).



Published by the Division of Communications for the  
Division of Family and Community Engagement

0060.26ct • Editorial, Graphics & Publishing Services • 8/25 • NP