

2022–2023

Guidelines for Respecting

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

in Montgomery County Public Schools

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

Maryland's Largest School District

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



VISION

We inspire learning by providing the greatest public education to each and every student.

MISSION

Every student will have the academic, creative problem solving, and social emotional skills to be successful in college and career.

CORE PURPOSE

Prepare all students to thrive in their future.

CORE VALUES

*Learning
Relationships
Respect
Excellence
Equity*

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2022–2023

Guideline's for Respecting

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

in Montgomery County Public Schools

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

These *Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity in Montgomery County Public Schools* are available in English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Amharic, and Portuguese on the MCPS web at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/students/rights/

Guideline's for Respecting Religious Diversity (English)

Maryland's Largest School District

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

September 2022

Dear Students, Parents/Guardians, and Colleagues,

Returning to school five days a week and in person during the 2021–2022 school year was rewarding, but not without challenges. As a community, we have adjusted to changing guidelines for in-school and out-of-school operations, necessitated by the ongoing pandemic, to keep all of us safe. As a community, it has become more important than ever before to collaborate and partner in every aspect of the work that must be done to ensure a high-quality education for all students.

We must continue to embrace the vibrant diversity of our Montgomery County community and ensure that all individuals, no matter their race, ethnicity, or religious identification, feel welcomed and valued in our school system. This is foundational so that everyone can successfully participate, teach, and learn at high levels, in a welcoming environment.

This commitment is codified in Montgomery County Board of Education Policy ACA, *Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency*, and it is needed more than ever, given the rise in hate, bias, and racism against minoritized communities. Part of that commitment is making sure our students have the right to express their religious and nonreligious beliefs and practices, free from discrimination, bullying, and harassment. As a school district, we are committed to making feasible and reasonable accommodations for those beliefs and practices, as we strive to create safe, positive, and respectful learning environments for all of our students.

In partnership,



Monifa B. McKnight

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QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CRISIS HOTLINES 24-hour information, Referrals and Supportive Conversation

Maryland Crisis Hotline/EveryMind/301-738-2255
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.

Youth Crisis Hotline of Montgomery County 301-738-9697

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 Department of Systemwide Emergency Management.240-740-3066

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

MCPS Student Welfare and Compliance: SWC@mcpsmd.org or TitleIX@mcpsmd.org. 240-740-3215

The MCPS districtwide Title IX coordinator and districtwide child abuse and neglect contact. The Student Welfare and Compliance web page is at <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/compliance/>. SWC works collaboratively with schools, the Office of the General Counsel 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
Dropbox to report inappropriate online activity within MCPS.

The Cyber Tipline 1-800-843-5678

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 caller.

Montgomery County Child Protective Services, Department of Health and Human Services (24 hours)240-777-4417 or 240-777-4815 TTY

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
24/7 hotline to report suspected adult abuse and neglect

Montgomery County Police Department, Special Victims Investigation Division (24 hours) . . . 240-773-5400

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)

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

Director, Student Leadership and Extracurricular Activities. 240-740-4692

Student Member of the Board
www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/members/student.aspx

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

Area Associate Superintendents, School Support and Improvement . . . 240-740-3100

Associate Superintendent, Student and Family Support and Engagement . . . 240-740-5630

Section 504 Resolution and Compliance . 240-740-3230

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
For systemwide information and emergency announcements:

MCPS on Twitter www.twitter.com/mcps
MCPS en Español www.twitter.com/mcpsespanol

MCPS on Facebook www.facebook.com/mcpsmd
MCPS en Español www.facebook.com/mcpsespanol

Alert MCPS . www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/alertMCPS

MCPS INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)

MCPS QuickNotes Email Messages and Newsletter. www.mcpsQuickNotes.org

Ask MCPS Information Service

Telephone. 240-740-3000
Spanish Hotline 240-740-2845
Email. AskMCPS@mcpsmd.org

MCPS Public Information Office 240-740-2837

MCPS Television 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

Search:

- MCPS School Directory
- MCPS Staff Directory
- MCPS Strategic Plan
- Athletics
- Be Well 365
- Board of Education
- B The One
- 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

- Grading and Reporting
- Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity
- Guidelines for Student Gender Identity
- Lunch Menus
- Maryland High School Assessments
- myMCPS Classroom
- 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 feasible and 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. Please note that these legal requirements 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 partnership and collaboration seek to promote respect and appreciation for the religions, beliefs, and customs of our diverse student population. They 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 Office of the Chief of Districtwide Services and Supports, Student Welfare and Compliance, at 240-740-3215, or SWC@mcpsmd.org. If your questions cannot be answered by MCPS staff, you also may contact the Board of Education chief of staff or the Board ombudsman at 240-740-3030, or 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. These are excused absences, and students will be allowed to make up missed assignments. If students miss school, they should bring a note from a parent/guardian providing a written explanation within three school days of returning to school.

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

Students have a responsibility and generally are expected to make up work they miss while absent from school. It is best for students and their parents/guardians to plan ahead to arrange extensions or other accommodations for work that students will miss when they are absent to observe a religious holiday. However, MCPS realizes that it is not always realistic or possible to do so. If the absence is excused, the student's teacher will help the student make up work, offer a retest, or grant an extension on classwork or homework that was due during the student's observance of a religious holiday. 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.

In addition, when assigning homework, schools should be mindful of cultural, ethnic, religious, and other celebrations or events that are important to members of our community. Montgomery County has developed a listing of Days of Commemoration, including certain holidays relating to the religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage of county residents, available at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcg/commemorations.html.

The Equity Initiatives Unit has a document that provides staff with background information about the many commemorations/holidays, which staff and other members of the MCPS community may find helpful as well. The calendar on the MCPS website will display the Days of Commemoration as a reference for staff, students, parents/guardians, and community members, in addition to MCPS school closure information. The calendar is available at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/calendars/.

■ 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 before a meal or before a test 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 a touchdown or a goal as long 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

Students may not be disciplined for their style of dress unless it—

- causes a disruption to the educational environment;
- endangers or potentially threatens the health and/or safety of self or others;
- fails to meet a reasonable requirement of a course or activity;
- is associated with gangs;
- is lewd, vulgar, obscene, or revealing or of a sexual nature; or
- promotes tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or sexual activity.

As long as their style of dress is consistent with these guidelines, students should be permitted to wear scarves, hijabs, yarmulkes, patkas, or other clothing or jewelry associated with their religion or containing a religious message.

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 immodest, based on religious beliefs. 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 director or the MCPS Athletics Unit.

■ 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 Instructional Programs for Religious Reasons

When possible, schools should try to make reasonable and feasible adjustments to the instructional program to accommodate requests from students, or requests from parents/guardians on behalf of their students, to be excused from specific classroom discussions or activities that they believe would impose a substantial burden on their religious beliefs. Students, or their parents/guardians on behalf of their students, also have the right to ask to be excused from the classroom activity if the students, or their parents/guardians, believe the activity would invade student privacy by

calling attention to the student's religion. When a student is excused from the classroom activity, the student will be provided with an alternative to the school activity or assignment.

Applying these principles, it may be feasible to accommodate objections from students or their parents/guardians to a particular reading assignment on religious grounds by providing an alternative selection that meets the same lesson objectives. However, if such requests become too frequent or too burdensome, the school may refuse to accommodate the requests. Schools are not required to alter fundamentally the educational program or create a separate educational program or a separate course to accommodate a student's religious practice or belief. For example, schools are not required to excuse students from all music instruction based on a religious concern, because music is an integral part of Maryland's arts curriculum; however, schools may seek to avoid, if possible, requiring a student with a religious objection to play an instrument or sing.

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. Indeed, it would be difficult to teach about these subjects without considering religious influences. The MCPS curriculum also builds students' understanding of the relationship between government and religious freedom as a preparation for full citizenship in a multicultural society. 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.

When assemblies or programs include student bands or other musical groups, participating students may request reasonable and feasible accommodations if they feel that performing religious music is inappropriate to their beliefs. 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/.

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 they are permitted to distribute other informational material that is unrelated to school curriculum or activities. 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-related informational materials.

These time, place, and manner-of-distribution requirements are reflected in MCPS regulations and rules that students' distribution of religious informational materials, like political materials or any other non-school-related 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-related 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. In addition, students may not distribute informational materials, whether religious or otherwise, that are obscene, defamatory, disruptive of the educational environment, or invade the rights of others in the school setting.

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 must be student led. MCPS staff 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.

Students should inform the MCPS administration about any student-led, religious extracurricular club or activity, and they should talk with school administrators 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 extracurricular student groups that are not related directly to a subject that is taught in school. This could include access to bulletin boards, computers, and notices in the school newspaper, if such access is made available to other extracurricular student groups that are not related directly to a subject that is taught in school. These religion-related extracurricular groups also may be listed in the section of the school yearbook designated for extracurricular student groups that are not related directly to a subject that is taught in school.

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

Student-led groups, whether religious or nonreligious, will not be permitted to meet in MCPS schools if they advocate violence or hate, engage in illegal activity, cause substantial disruption of the school, violate MCPS nondiscrimination policies, or invade the rights of others in the school setting. However, schools may not ban students from forming groups solely because they involve discussion of controversial and complex social and legal issues.

Students may participate in before- or after-school events with religious content on the same terms as they may participate in other non-curriculum-related activities on school premises.

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-related 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.

Partnerships Between Schools and Faith Communities

MCPS works to maintain and develop partnerships with the faith community, 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.

Any faith community partnership program 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 partnership is educational and secular in nature, not religious, and that volunteers must respect the First Amendment rights of students. No volunteers or other participants in any faith community partnership program may 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 participants in faith community partnership programs 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

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 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.**

For inquiries or complaints about discrimination against MCPs students*	For inquiries or complaints about discrimination against MCPs staff*
Director of Student Welfare and Compliance Office of District Operations Student Welfare and Compliance 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 55, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-3215 SWC@mcpsmd.org	Human Resource Compliance Officer Office of Human Resources and Development Department of Compliance and Investigations 45 West Gude Drive, Suite 2100, 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 Office of Academic Officer Resolution and Compliance Unit 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 208, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-3230 RACU@mcpsmd.org	ADA Compliance Coordinator Office of Human Resources and Development Department of Compliance and Investigations 45 West Gude Drive, Suite 2100, 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 Office of District Operations Student Welfare and Compliance 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 55, Rockville, MD 20850 240-740-3215 TitleIX@mcpsmd.org	

*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; or U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), The Wanamaker Building, 100 Penn Square East, Suite 515, Philadelphia, PA 19107, 1-800-421-3481, 1-800-877-8339 (TDD), OCR@ed.gov, or www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html.

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

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. 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, or MCPsInterpretingServices@mcpsmd.org.

Maryland's Largest School District

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Published by the Department of Materials Management for the Office of Strategic Initiatives

0854.22ct • Editorial, Graphics & Publishing Services • 9/22 • NP

