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**I. PURPOSE**

Athlos Academy recognizes that a student's right to freedom of speech and religion is guaranteed protected under the First Amendment and as a result, ensures that religion is neither promoted nor inhibited.

**II. POLICY**

- A. Athlos Academy shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or non-belief. Instead, it encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for and tolerance of each other's views.
- B. Athlos Academy recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase its students' knowledge and appreciation of music, art, drama, and literature, some of which may have a religious basis or origin as well as a secular importance, but fundamentally is intrinsic to the overall learning experience of its students.
- C. Two obligations of Athlos Academy regarding a student's right to freedom of speech and religion are:
  1. Athlos Academy may not endorse religious practices or doctrine, nor may religious activity be coerced; and
  2. Athlos Academy may not forbid students acting on their own from expressing their personal religious views solely because they are of a religious nature.
- D. Regarding a student's right to partake in or decline to partake in the Pledge of Allegiance:
  1. Students are to recite the Pledge once a day;
  2. Notices shall be posted in conspicuous places noting a student's right not to participate; and
  3. If a student does not wish to participate, he/she may respectfully remain seated.
- E. Times when free exercise of religious practices may be prohibited:
  1. The conduct/speech unreasonably interferes with the ability of school officials to maintain order and discipline;
  2. Violates school rules;
  3. Impinges on the rights of others;
  4. Unreasonably endangers persons/property;

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5. Creates a coercive atmosphere;
  6. When student dominates classroom instruction time with religious talk; and/or
  7. Violates concepts of civility/propriety appropriate to a school setting.
- F. Times when free exercise of religious practices may not be prohibited, unless it violates the standards above, includes, but is not limited to the following:
1. Reading the Bible or other religious texts or scripture;
  2. Saying grace before meals;
  3. Praying with friends in cafeterias, hallways, around flagpoles, or at an athletic event and other extracurricular activities;
  4. Discussing religious views with other students, attempting to persuade peers about religious topics as long as persuasive speech does not constitute harassment; and/or
  5. In homework/classroom discussions, presentations, or assignments as long as the topic remains objective and informative and does not put other beliefs down.
- G. Religion in curriculum:
1. Teaching and researching religion/beliefs of conscience is a legitimate part of academic education;
  2. Significance of holidays, whether religious or secular, may be explained/discussed in an objective manner as part of classroom instruction or as questions arise from students so as to promote a better understanding among all students;
  3. May display religious symbols as part of holiday/cultural heritage (as a teaching resource);
  4. Religious music is allowed as long as it is seasonally appropriate;
  5. Sacred music may be performed as long as there is a focus on overall quality and educational/historical value; and
  6. Parent/guardian(s) may request a waiver of participation in any portion of the curriculum or school activity which the requesting party believes to be an infringement upon a right of conscience or the exercise of religious freedom.
- H. Expressions of personal belief from school employees:
1. An employee may not attempt to use his/her position to influence a student regarding the student's religious beliefs or lack thereof.

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2. An employee may respond in an appropriate and restrained manner to a spontaneous question from a student regarding the employee's personal belief or perspective.
  - a. Nevertheless, because of the special position of trust held by school employees, employees may not advocate or encourage acceptance of a belief or perspective; but may explain or define personal religious beliefs or perspectives, etc.

### **Legal References:**

[La. Rev. Stat. §13:5233](#) (*Free exercise of religion protected*)

[La. Rev. Stat. §17:2115](#) (*Silent prayer or meditation; pledge of allegiance*)