

Public School and Faith Community Partnership Programs

Children and schools gain a great deal when every part of a community comes together to support their education. We encourage the growing partnerships between our local schools and local faith communities. These partnerships can support existing public school programs or programs conducted by a faith community in a public school or in a faith community facility.

The structure and implementation of public school and faith community partnership programs must allow for religion to be treated with fairness and respect. A partnership program can neither foster religion nor preclude it. At all times a student's religious expression and freedom of conscience must be vigorously protected regardless of the physical location of the program.

Public school and faith community partnership programs:

1. May not forbid students acting on their own, from expressing their personal religious views or beliefs solely because they are of a religious nature.
2. May not discriminate against private religious expression by students, but must instead give students the same right to engage in religious activity and discussion as they have to engage in other comparable activity.
3. May not endorse religious activity or doctrine, nor may they coerce participation in religious activity.
4. Recognize that the right of religious expression in a government program does not include the right to have a "captive audience" listen or to compel other students to participate.

To ensure students' religious freedom and participation in activities in school or in school supported programs outside the school facility, it is important that structures are in place to protect these basic rights. As schools and faith communities develop partnership programs, the development of written agreements or memorandums of understanding can clearly establish the program parameters and how they will be implemented. Guidelines to frame the development of public school and faith community partnerships are outlined on page two.

Guidelines for the Development of Public School and Faith Community Partnership Programs

The following points are points to consider in creating a public school and faith community partnership program.

1. Jointly determines and defines objectives and goals which are agreed to in writing.
2. Identifies, defines, and agrees to, in writing, program expectations and scope to include timelines, specific activities, and methods employed to conduct activities.
3. Executes measures to ensure staff and volunteers understand and agree to implement program objectives, goals, expectations, and scope as identified and defined.
4. Develops and conducts training for both the public school and faith community staffs and volunteers on the application of program guidelines and implementation of activities.
5. Will provide programs for which a student's participation is voluntary. Students' school performance measurement will not be based on whether or not they participate in a partnership program. Parental permission must be granted for participation in a partnership program.
6. Allows and makes reasonable accommodations for a student's religious and cultural requirements.
7. Will not require students to participate in an activity which is restricted by their religion.
8. Will not distribute religious materials to students.
9. Will conduct a faith community facility, will not occur simultaneously in the same space in which a religious program is being conducted.
10. Will develop a communication process to effectively exchange information and foster open dialogue between the principle representatives of the faith community and the public school partnership.