

## PRAYER AND PERIOD OF SILENCE

### I. PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for prayer and a period of silence.

### II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all schools.

### III. POLICY STATEMENT

#### Period of Silence

In order for all students and teachers to prepare themselves for the activities of the day, a period of silence of approximately one (1) minute in duration shall be maintained in each grade in public schools at the beginning of each school day. At the opening of the first class each day, it is the responsibility of each teacher in charge of each class to call the students to order and announce that a moment of silence is to be observed. The teacher shall not indicate or suggest to the students any action to be taken by them during this time, but shall maintain silence for the full time. At the end of this time, the teacher shall indicate resumption of the class in an appropriate fashion, and may at that time make school announcements or conduct any other class business before commencing instruction.

#### Prayer

There shall be no school-sponsored or school-directed public prayer at any school-sponsored or school-directed activity.

Students and employees shall be permitted to pray throughout the day in accordance with state law.<sup>3,4</sup> A student shall have the right to voluntarily pray in school, vocally or silently, alone or with other students to the same extent and under the same circumstances as a student is permitted to vocally or silently reflect, meditate or speak on non-religious matters alone or with other students in school.<sup>5</sup> It is lawful for any

teacher to permit the voluntary participation by students or others in prayer. This does not authorize any teacher or other school authority to prescribe the form or content of any prayer.

Additionally, a school employee shall have the right to quietly say grace before a meal and to voluntarily meet with other school employees for prayer before or after school or during the employee's lunch period.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the provisions above regarding a period of silence and the lawfulness of teachers to allow participation by students and others in prayer, nonsectarian and nonproselytizing voluntary benedictions, invocations or prayers that are initiated and given by a student volunteer or student volunteers may be permitted on public school property during school-related noncompulsory student assemblies, school-related student sporting events and school-related commencement ceremonies. Such permission shall not be construed to indicate any support, approval or sanction by the state or any governmental personnel or official of the contents of the benedictions, invocations or prayers or to be the promotion or establishment of any religion, religious belief or sect.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITY**

A. The principal is responsible for ensuring that this policy is administered at his/her school.

B. The Department charged with academics is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented. Legal questions regarding this policy should be directed to the Office of the General Counsel.

C. The Superintendent is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed.

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Legal References:

1. *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 112 S. Ct. 2649, 120 L. Ed. 2<sup>nd</sup> 467 (1992)
2. TCA 49-6-1004; USCA 20 § 7904
3. TCA 49-6-2904(a)(1) through (3)
4. TCA 49-6-8004(a)(1) through (4)
5. TCA 49-6-2904(b)(1)
6. TCA 49-6-8004(b)(2) and (4)

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Cross References: