

RELEASED TIME FOR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

The Board of Education desires to cooperate with those parents who wish to provide for religious instruction for their children but also recognizes its responsibility to enforce the attendance requirements of the State.

Students may be excused from school not more than one (1) time per week for up to 60 minutes to attend a course in religious instruction conducted by a private entity off District property, provided that the following requirements are met, such students will not be considered absent when the:

- A. student's parent or guardian gives consent in writing;
 - (1) an entity shall accept and make accommodations for all students who have permission to attend and the district shall allow that student to attend,
 - (2) consent forms shall be updated and resubmitted each year,
 - (3) the student may opt out of any release time program at their own request on both a daily and term basis; additionally the School shall immediately notify the student's parent or guardian when a student chooses to opt out,
 - (4) consent forms shall be provided by the sponsoring entity and must include specific information about which classes students will be released from, how long students will be released and where religious instruction will be provided.
- B. sponsoring entity maintains full daily attendance records, shall make them immediately available to the District upon request, and provides them to the District weekly;
 - (1) the District must subtract these hours from instructional hour tracking and reporting,
 - (2) records related to attendance or participation in religious released-time instruction shall not be provided in any correspondence or documentation from the public school district to parents or guardians, except as permitted in Section A (3) of this policy,
 - (3) the District neither aids, assists or enforces attendance in a religious instruction program.

C. sponsoring entity provides and assumes all liability for the student starting from the time of release until students are checked back into the school building; and

(1) sponsoring entity shall provide the district documentation of all insurance policies and coverage,

(2) sponsoring entity must not ask participating student's parent or guardian to release or waive liability,

D. student assumes responsibility for any missed school work and instruction;

(1) students participating in release time religious instruction will be held to the same grading evaluations and standards for missed classes as those not participating,

(2) teachers and administrators shall not adjust or alter the curriculum, teaching schedule, or lesson plans to make accommodations for students missing class for release time instruction,

(3) the principal of each school shall support teachers in ensuring the appropriate continuance of scheduled educational programming, aligned with state and district goals by grade level, for those students who remain at school and do not participate in the release time programs while they are occurring.

Transportation of students to and from Release Time instruction is the complete responsibility of the sponsoring entity, the parent, guardian, and/or

E. student and may not be arranged, coordinated, or provided for by public school personnel;

(1) sponsoring entity must agree to a transportation plan which shall be established by the district. This agreement shall be similar to the District's normal transportation policies and specifically include that vehicles owned by a sponsoring entity and their drivers meet the same OSHP, ODEW, and DOT regulations, requirements and guidelines for school buses and drivers as deemed necessary by the District,

(2) transportation provided by the sponsoring entity must make accommodations for all students with disabilities.

The Board of Education, its members, and employees are immune from liability for any injuries arising from transportation to and from Released Time instruction. The Board of Education, its members, and employees are immune from liability for any injuries arising from the time students have been released until the time they are back in school custody.

Further, no Board resources or funds will be directly or indirectly expended for, and no District personnel shall be involved in the provision, accommodation or promotion of religious instruction, including soliciting student enrollment

Students shall not be excused from a core curriculum subject course to attend Released Time instruction. The District deems all courses to be core curricular, including but not limited to courses that are state-mandated curriculum.¹ Religious release shall not occur during instructional time.

Staff members shall not promote or discourage participation in release time programs for any religious instructional program. All promotional activities for such instruction must be conducted off school grounds.

In addition:

- (1) Any sponsoring entity must sign an MOU with the Board of Education expressing they are meeting the requirements of the law, as well as District policy, and any other requirements set for by the District before moving beyond preliminary engagement with the community. Program implementation must occur after the mutual agreement is signed by both parties.
- (2) No district property shall be provided, rented, leased or otherwise permitted to be used to private entities providing released time religious instruction. A public school may not connect bells, telephones, computers, internet service or other devices between public school buildings and institutions offering religious instruction.
- (3) Anyone connected, associated, employed by or volunteering with the entity shall complete a background check equivalent to the District's, which shall include screenings by the FBI, BCI and enrollment into the RapBack system. The results must be provided to the District, who shall bare no costs.
- (4) The District shall not include schedules of classes for release time programs in school catalogs, registration forms or any other regularly printed school material. Class schedules or course catalogs shall not include a released-time class. District publications may not include pictures, reports, information or records regarding released-time classes.

¹ More language options available [here](#)

- (5) Registration for release time programs must occur off school premises, and must be done on forms and supplies furnished by the group or institution offering the program.
- (6) Solicitation of students for participation in released time programs for religious instruction shall not take place on or near school facilities, including but not limited to directly contacting students on school premises or encouraging students in the program to recruit their friends. Furthermore, no announcements of any kind regarding released time programs will be made in school.
- (7) Sponsoring entities, their employees and volunteers shall not provide students with any invitational or promotional materials, snacks, clothing, candies, trinkets, toys or other non educational items to return to school with.
- (8) A teacher of a released-time class is not a member of the public school faculty, directly contracted or otherwise, including volunteers.
- (9) Any student behavior issues that occur during release time instruction and observed by the organization are to be addressed directly between the organization and the student's parent or guardian, and not referred back to the school district for resolution or punishment.
- (10) The district shall not provide lunches to be consumed off campus for children participating in religious time. Meals provided by the sponsoring entity and the location they are served in must meet USDA standards.
- (11) Sponsoring entity shall make necessary preparations and provide all accommodations required to meet the medical and behavioral needs of all students. Staff must include individuals who are certified and trained in first aid.
- (12) The maintenance records and inspection reports of any transportation vehicles used by any sponsoring entity shall be provided to the district.
- (13) The District may disqualify any sponsoring entity from having students released to them if they do not meet the guidelines and requirements set forth in this policy.

Nothing herein shall constitute an endorsement of religion or infringe upon an individual's First Amendment rights.

*This example policy has been expanded from Neola policy po5223.