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 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;
3. Any teacher or student may decline to participate in reciting the Pledge in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 121A.11; and
4. Students must be respectful of the choice to not recite the pledge.

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;
Freedom of Speech and Religion in School

4. Unreasonably endangers persons/property;
5. Creates a coercive atmosphere;
6. When student dominates classroom instruction time with religious talk; and/or
7. Violates concepts of civility/propropriety 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 conscious 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.
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:
Minn. Stat. § 120A.22, Subd. 12(3) (Compulsory Instruction)
Minn. Stat. § 120A.35 (Absence from School for Religious Observance)
Minn. Stat. § 121A.11, Subd. 3 (Pledge of Allegiance)