

FCPS Guidelines Regarding Prayer

- We have had reports that some coaches are leading student prayers before football games, that printed copies of prayers and/or scripture are being distributed by FCPS staff to team members, and that FCPS staff are arranging for FCA-sponsored ministers and other non-FCPS adults to lead prayer sessions consisting of students in designated rooms at game time. If these practices are occurring, they create legal problems. Consequently, I want to remind you about the FCPS rules regarding prayer gatherings.
- FCPS and FCPS staff cannot sponsor or lead prayer at FCPS games, practices and other school sponsored activities---even if the prayer sessions are voluntary for the students, and even if students of different faiths are allowed to gather separately. Nor can FCPS staff distribute religious material to students.
- You can allow a moment of silence at FCPS sponsored activities, but that means silence, in which students are free to do whatever they want: meditate, pray silently, do nothing, etc.
- Students may pray out loud, either individually or collectively, but they cannot make prayer part of an official FCPS activity such as a game, or interrupt such activity so that others are subject to their public prayer. Student prayer groups must be voluntary and student initiated; the group may not be sponsored by the school or FCPS employees; and the meetings may not interfere with educational or school-sponsored activities. FCPS sponsors/employees who are present at these student or club meetings may not participate in prayer or other religious activities---they may only supervise the gatherings from an administrative point of view (e.g. make sure meetings are safe, held in proper locations, follow school rules etc)
- At FCA meetings, either formal or informal, nonschool persons may not direct, conduct or regularly attend the student-initiated prayer activities.

- This information will be republished in a fanout. Please help us by discussing these issues with your coaches.
- If you want to read the relevant rules, the key documents are: P1460 (FCPS shall be neutral with respect to religious beliefs, and shall neither disparage nor advocate religion); R1461 (FCPS teachers cannot teach religion, can teach *about* it as it relates to other elements of human culture, appears in literature etc); OEC guidance on prayer (student prayer must be student initiated and employees cant participate.
<http://www.fcps.edu/DHR/employees/oec/relguide.htm>)
- If you have questions, call Sherry Brathwaite, Director of Office of Equity and Compliance. She receives many prayer questions from schools and can provide you with practical guidance for responding to students wishing to pray.