

## PROCEDURES FOR RELIGIOUS CLUBS IN GRADES 9-12

### GENERAL PROHIBITION AGAINST RELIGIOUS CLUBS IN SCHOOLS

The United States Constitution and the North Carolina Constitution guarantee individual religious freedom but prohibit government actors from engaging in any activity that either promotes or criticizes religious beliefs or practices.

Schools and school employees may not sponsor or participate in religious clubs, activities or groups during the school day or as part of the school program.

All non-school groups, whether religious or secular, must follow Policy 4.102 (Community Use of Facilities) and the requirements of Procedure 4.102-P in order to use school facilities during non-school time.

### LIMITS ON STUDENT RELIGIOUS CLUBS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

The federal Equal Access Act imposes a duty on high schools not to discriminate against student-initiated clubs *based on the club's religious, political, or philosophical content*. If high schools allow non-curriculum clubs to meet during non-instructional time, the Equal Access Act makes it unlawful for them to deny student-initiated religious clubs equal access to the school facilities.

Principals of students in grades 9 through 12 must allow *student-initiated* religious clubs to conduct meetings during non-instructional time in the school day at the same times, in the same places, and under the same general guidelines as school-sponsored clubs. Pitt County Schools' guidelines for such clubs are set out in Policy 10.703 (Student Organizations) and Procedure 10.703-P.

High school principals have the duty to prohibit school employees from engaging in any activities that either promote or criticize religious clubs, beliefs or practices. *At student religious club meetings, a school monitor must be present to protect the general well-being of students, but may not promote, lead, or participate in the club meetings*. The Equal Access Act also prohibits adults from outside the school community from directing, conducting, controlling, or regularly attending activities of student-initiated religious clubs.

No public funds may be spent on behalf of student religious clubs, except for the incidental cost of providing space in the high school for their meetings.