RELIGIOUS-BASED EXEMPTIONS

Code **IMBC** *Adopted*

The district is committed to meeting the educational needs of all student while respecting the religious beliefs and values of its students and their families. The district serves students from a wide range of backgrounds, and it is the responsibility of the board, teachers, and administrators to balance the district's educational goals and current statewide instructional standards with sensitivity of the sincerely held religious beliefs of its students and their parent/legal guardians.

Objection To Materials

While students are expected to participate in all required instructional programs and activities, the board recognizes that there may be instances in which a student and/or their parent/legal guardian object to a specific classroom discussion, assigned reading, or activity. It is the policy of Florence School District Three to provide a process for parents/legal guardians to request that their child be excused from specific classroom discussions, assigned readings, or activities that the parent/legal guardian believes are contrary to their sincerely held religious beliefs.

Parents/legal guardian will be notified in advance of upcoming instruction, classroom discussions, activities, and assigned readings involving gender identity, sexual orientation, or related moral topics. Such notice will be provided through one or more of the following methods:

- class syllabi distributed within the first five days of each semester.
- periodic classroom updates via school/class websites that preview upcoming instructional materials containing sensitive content
- maintain an updated catalog of all books and materials in Destiny Classroom Library Manager (DCLM)
- written notice

Inspection and review of instructional materials

Parents/legal guardians who would like to inspect and review instructional materials before use should make a written request to the school principal, identifying the instructional materials the parent/legal guardian is seeking to preview. Within five days of receiving the request, the school principal will provide access to the requested materials along with the Religious Opt-Out Request Form.

The district will provide access to the requested materials by providing the parent/legal guardian with a copy of the materials or by scheduling a mutually agreeable date and time for the parent/legal guardian to come into the school to review the materials.

Opt-out requests

The parent/legal guardian may request that their child be excused from participating instruction, classroom discussions, activities, or assigned readings that may conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs. The request must be submitted in writing using the Religious Opt-Out Request Form to the classroom teacher.

The classroom teacher will review the request to ensure the objection is clearly identified and religious in nature.

The classroom teacher will defer to the parent/legal guardian's good-faith assertion of a sincere religious belief. The parent/legal guardian will not be required to prove their faith or to defend their beliefs.

The classroom teacher must approve the request in writing by noting the action taken on the Religious Opt-Out Form.

Students will not be penalized for their inability to participate instruction on gender, sexuality, or other sensitive moral topics where accommodation have been granted based on the sincerely held religious beliefs of the students' parent/guardian. Where feasible, an appropriate alternative assignment will be provided. If so suitable alternative assignments is available, the student will be excused from the instruction or assignment without penalty.

The district will keep written documentation of parental notices, Religious Opt-Out Forms, and any alternative assignments offered in accordance with the district's recordkeeping policies.

Parents/legal guardians who have concerns about instructional materials for reason other than their sincerely held religious beliefs should follow the procedures outlined in KEC, *Public Concerns and Complaints About Instructional Resources.*

The superintendent will develop the necessary administrative procedures to implement this policy.

Training

The district will provide annual training to teachers and school principals regarding parental rights and the proper handling of opt-out requests.

Escalation Protocol

If the classroom teacher refuses to provide the requested information to the parent/legal guardian or refuses to allow an opt-out, the parent/legal guardian may escalate the matter to the principal.

If, after escalating the matter to the principal, the parent/legal guardian believes their request is unresolved, the parent/legal guardian may escalate the request to the superintendent or his/her designee for consideration.

If objections become so frequent or broad that providing alternative instruction is impractical, the superintendent will refer the matter to the board for review.

Notice
This policy will be posted on the district website.

Cf. JRA, KEC

Legal References:

A. Federal Cases: *Mahmoud v. Taylor,* 606 U.S. 522 (2025).

B. S.C. States Board of Education Regulations:

1. R 43-170- Uniform Procedure for Selection or Reconsideration of Instructional Materials

FILE: IMBC-E

RELIGIOUS-BASED EXEMPTIONS FORM

Purpose: This form allows parents or legal guardian to request that their child be excused from participation in specific mandatory instruction that conflicts with the family's sincerely held religious beliefs, in accordance with *Mahmoud v. Taylor (*U.S. Supreme Court, 2025) and applicable South Carolina law.

Section 1: Parent/Guardian Statement

As the parent or legal guardian of _____, I have identified the following mandatory instruction as contrary to our sincerely held religious beliefs and a burden on our family's religious exercise and beliefs. Accordingly. I request that the student(s) named herein be excused from participation in such instruction.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____
Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____
Grade/Class: _____ School: _____
Residential Address: _____
Email Address: _____
Phone Number: _____

Section 2: Description of Instruction or Material

Please list the specific instructional activity, book, video, or materials that conflict with your family's sincerely held religious beliefs. Include book titles, page numbers, lessons, etc. For portions of materials, please indicate page numbers or sections of the material, if known. Please identify the class in which the material(s) are available, and the name of the teacher whose class the materials are available. If specific information about the lesson, materials, or portions thereof is not known, please contact your student's teacher for additional information that may assist you in determining and specifying your objection.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

District Use Only

Received by Signature: _____
Received by Print Name & Title: _____
Date Received: _____

Notes/Action Taken: _____
_____
_____

This opt-out is different from and does not alter or diminish the opt-out right described in South Carolina Code section 59-32-50 (relating to certain aspects of comprehensive health education program classes) or in other statuary or regulatory sections.