Model Policy: Volunteer School Chaplains Program

Pursuant to section 1012.461, Florida Statutes, Florida’s school districts are permitted to establish a Volunteer School Chaplains Program to “provide support, services, and programs to students as assigned by the district school board.” To support student wellbeing, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County School District wishes to establish a Volunteer School Chaplain Program.

In this policy, the following definitions apply:

1. “Chaplain” means an individual who is officially authorized by the leadership of a religion under the religion’s governing principles to conduct religious exercises.
2. “Local religious affiliation” means current, official membership in a group that is itself officially part of a religion and meets in-person at least monthly at a location within the geographical boundaries of the school district.
3. “Religion” means an organized group led, supervised, or counseled by a hierarchy of teachers, clergy, sages, or priests that (1) acknowledges the existence of and worships a supernatural entity or entities that possesses power over the natural world, (2) regularly engages in some form of ceremony, ritual, or protocol, and (3) whose religious beliefs impose moral duties independent of the believer’s self-interest.

The Volunteer School Chaplain Program is created to provide the following support, services, and programs to students:

1. [School district lists all the specific services they want the chaplains to provide. For example, mentoring students, assisting with extracurricular activities such as religiously affiliated clubs, building resiliency skills, and offering spiritual guidance as requested]

The principal at each district school must notify all parents annually of the availability of the Volunteer School Chaplain Program. This notice must include the following:

1. a list of the supports, services, and programs available through the volunteer chaplain program;
2. a list of all the approved chaplains, including their local religious affiliation;
3. a parent permission form;
4. instructions on where to submit the parent permission form; and
5. a link to the program’s webpage.

The principal at each school is responsible for ensuring each person who applies to serve as a volunteer chaplain meets these minimum requirements before being put on the school’s list of Volunteer School Chaplains:

1. Meet the definition of chaplain above;
2. Not be disqualified following a background screening under section 1012.465, Florida Statutes;
3. Demonstrate a local religious affiliation as defined above;
4. Possess a bachelor’s degree consisting of at least 120 semester hours;
5. Possess a graduate degree in counseling or theology consisting of at least 36 semester hours, or demonstrate seven years as a chaplain as defined above;
6. Demonstrate at least two years as a chaplain with a local religious affiliation as those terms are defined above;
7. Sign an assurance that he or she will not teach or encourage students to behave contrary to any of Florida’s state academic standards; and
8. Demonstrate a sincere desire to meet the objectives of the Volunteer School Chaplain Program and enhance student welfare. A principal may deny the application of any individual to become a volunteer chaplain if the principal determines that the individual is not applying to fulfill the program’s purpose or the applicant’s participation will be contrary to the pedagogical interests of the school and the chaplaincy program.