

## **Policy Code: 2315 Opening Invocations Before Board Meetings**

In order to solemnize and lend gravity to the occasion, it is the policy of the board to allow for a brief, respectful invocation to be offered to the board and for the benefit of the board before its meetings.

### **A. Generally**

The invocation is not part of the official business of the board. No member or employee of the board shall review the prayers in advance of the meetings or be involved in the content of any invocation that is to be offered by an invitational speaker if the invitational speaker is a member of the public. No invitational speaker shall receive compensation from the board for his or her service.

### **B. Procedure for the Selection of Invitational Speaker**

The invocation, which shall be no more than three (3) minutes long, shall be voluntarily delivered by a religious leader or the leader of any assembly that periodically and regularly meets within the county for the purpose of worshiping or discussing their religious or non-religious perspectives. Each congregation or assembly that chooses to participate in providing an invocation for the board shall choose its invitational speaker.

To ensure that the invitational speakers are selected from among a wide pool of the county's religious leaders or leaders of organized assemblies, the invitational speakers shall be selected according to the following procedure:

1. Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this policy, the superintendent shall post a notice inviting all religious congregations and organized assemblies that periodically meet within the county for the purpose of worshiping or discussing their religious perspectives to identify a speaker to deliver an invocation before a scheduled meeting of the board.
2. The notice shall be published at least annually in all newspapers of general circulation in New Hanover County as well as on the New Hanover County Board of Education website.
3. The notice shall include the dates of all board meetings during the year and direct potential invitational speakers to contact the superintendent or the superintendent's designee by e-mail or U.S. mail and provide their name, congregation or organized assembly, preferred meeting date, and contact information.
4. If more than one potential invitational speaker signs up for a board meeting date, the invitational speaker will be selected at random by lottery conducted by the superintendent or the superintendent's designee. The

superintendent will complete the invocation schedule and notify the participants.

5. In the event no invitational speaker is signed up for a particular meeting, a moment of silence will be observed.

6. The notice to be published by the superintendent shall read as follows:

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*An Invitation to Provide Invocations Before Meetings of the New Hanover County Board of Education.*

*The religious leaders or chosen leaders of any assembly that periodically worships or regularly meets in New Hanover County for the purpose of worshiping or discussing their religious perspectives are invited to offer a brief invocation before a meeting of the New Hanover County Board of Education that is no more than three (3) minutes long.*

*Invocation speakers are free to offer an invocation to the Board of Education according to the dictates of their own conscience. The Board requests only that the purpose of the invocation be to lend gravity to the occasion in a manner that is solemn and respectful in tone and that invites Board members to reflect upon shared ideals and common ends.*

*The Board further requests that speakers not promote one faith or belief system over others, disparage other faiths or belief systems, attempt to convert others to the speaker's faith or belief system, or ask the Board and audience members to participate by rising or otherwise.*

### **C. Non-Affiliation with Any Faith or Religious Denomination**

The board recognizes that New Hanover County is home to people of a variety of religious faiths and beliefs and to people who do not have religious faiths and beliefs. Therefore, this policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the board with, nor express the board's preference for, any faith or religious denomination.

Legal References: [G.S. 115C-47](#); [U.S. Const. amend. 1](#); *Town of Greece, N.Y. v. Galloway*, 572 U.S. 565 (2014); *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983); *Lund v. Rowan County*, 863 F.3d 268 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2017)

Adopted: October 3, 2023

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