

Uwharrie Charter Academy

Released Time for Religious Instruction

I. Purpose and Authority

This policy is adopted pursuant to G.S. 115C-218.75(p) and G.S. 115C-407.45, which requires the board of directors of every North Carolina charter school to adopt a policy authorizing a principal to excuse a student's absence to attend released time for religious instruction. This policy also implements the related excused-absence and make-up-work provisions of G.S. 115C-379.

Nothing in this policy is intended to endorse, sponsor, or affiliate the School with any religious organization or curriculum. The School's role is limited to administering excused absences in accordance with State law.

II. Definitions

1. "Released time religious instruction" means religious instruction offered by a private entity (the "sponsoring entity") during the school day, off School property, that a student attends in lieu of regularly scheduled instruction.
2. "Sponsoring entity" means the private organization that develops and conducts the released time religious instruction.

III. Weekly Time Allotment

The School shall excuse students for released time for religious instruction of at least one hour per week. Consistent with G.S. 115C-407.45(b)(6), the Principal shall not authorize excused absences totaling more than four hours of released time religious instruction in any single calendar week.

The School has elected to make available up to 4 hour(s) of released time religious instruction per week. No student shall be excused from a scheduled core academic course to attend released time religious instruction unless the School's daily schedule makes this unavoidable, in which case the School shall work with the family to identify an alternative time slot where practicable.

IV. Conditions of Participation

Participation in released time religious instruction is voluntary. A student's absence to attend released time religious instruction shall be excused only if all of the following conditions are met:

A. Parental Consent

The student's parent or legal guardian has requested in writing an excused absence for this purpose. The request shall provide notice that the parent or guardian — not the School — is responsible for arranging transportation to and from the location where released time religious instruction occurs.

B. Attendance Documentation

For each day the student is absent to attend released time religious instruction, the student's parent or guardian shall provide the School with written documentation affirming that the student attended. The School shall not treat the absence as excused for any day for which this documentation is not received.

C. Make-Up Work

A student attending released time religious instruction is responsible for making up all schoolwork missed during the absence, consistent with G.S. 115C-407.45(b)(3).

In turn, and consistent with G.S. 115C-379(b1), the student's teacher(s) shall give the student a reasonable opportunity to make up any tests, assignments, or other work missed. "Reasonable opportunity" means the following, unless a longer period is necessary to accommodate a documented disability or an extended absence:

- The teacher shall identify the missed work and communicate it to the student (or, for elementary students, to the parent/guardian) no later than the school day following the absence.
- In accordance with the UCA handbook, students will be given one day for each day absent to make up work, absent an agreement between the teacher and student/parent for additional time.
- A student who submits make-up work within this period shall not be penalized solely for the lateness of the submission caused by the released time absence.

D. No Use of Public Funds

No State or local funds shall be expended to facilitate a student's attendance at released time religious instruction..

E. Location; Use of School Facilities

Released time religious instruction shall not be conducted on School property, except to the extent the School has adopted a separate, religion-neutral facility use policy that makes School facilities available to community groups generally, and the sponsoring entity is permitted to use School facilities on the same terms as any other community group under that policy.

F. Transportation and Supervision

Transportation to and from the location of released time religious instruction is the sole responsibility of the sponsoring entity, the parent or legal guardian, or the student, as applicable. The School assumes no responsibility for the student's transportation, supervision, or safety once the student has been signed out to attend released time for religious instruction, and resumes responsibility only upon the student's return to School property or a School-sponsored activity.

G. Sponsoring Entity Obligations

Before a sponsoring entity's course may be included in the School's released time program, the sponsoring entity shall agree in writing to do all of the following:

- Maintain accurate attendance records for participating students and make those records available to the School upon request to verify a student's attendance;
- Provide the School, upon request, with a copy of the course syllabus;
- Assume supervisory responsibility for, and liability arising from, students while they are in the sponsoring entity's care, and provide the School with reasonably satisfactory evidence of liability insurance or an indemnification agreement covering that responsibility.

V. Neutrality

School administrators and staff shall not, in their official capacities, encourage or discourage a student's participation in released time religious instruction, and shall administer this policy in a manner neutral to the religious content or denominational affiliation of any sponsoring entity's course.

VI. Administration

The Principal (or designee) is responsible for day-to-day administration of this policy, including maintaining attendance documentation, coordinating scheduling with sponsoring entities, and ensuring teachers are aware of students' participation for purposes of the make-up work provisions of Section IV.C.

VII. Non-Endorsement

Adoption of this policy, and the School's administration of excused absences under it, does not constitute the School's endorsement of, agreement with, or sponsorship of any religious organization, sponsoring entity, or curriculum.

Adopted by the Board of Directors of Uwharrie Charter Academy on 8/13/26.

Legal references: G.S. 115C-407.45; G.S. 115C-379; G.S. 115C-218.75(p); S.L. 2026-41 (2026 Current Operations Appropriations Act).