

**Teaching About Religion Procedures**  
**Supports Policy 7178**

New Hanover County Board of Education requires the following concerning teaching about religion.

**Procedures**

1. Religion in the Curriculum
  - a. When religion is included in the curriculum as part of the study of art, literature, history, etc, it shall be treated with the same objectivity and educational intent expected in other areas. Such studies shall not foster any particular religious tenet or demean any religious belief.
  - b. Materials and activities shall be sensitive to the diversity of belief systems.
  - c. Instructional activities addressing religion shall meet the three-part test established by the Supreme Court to determine constitutionality:
    - i. The activity shall have a secular purpose.
    - ii. The activity's principal or primary effect shall be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.
    - iii. The activity shall not foster an excessive governmental entanglement with religion.
  - d. When the subject of religion occurs naturally in studying other topics such as history, literature, culture, etc., it shall be treated as part of that study. (For example, the study of American Indians, the Pilgrims, Greek mythology or the Crusades may be enhanced by the inclusion of the role of religion.)
  - e. Student- initiated responses to questions or assignments which reflect beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme will be accommodated when appropriate. (For example, students are free in the classroom to express religious beliefs or non-beliefs in compositions, art forms, music, speech, and debate.)
  - f. Students shall be taught to develop an appreciation of the value of religious liberty as guaranteed by the United States Constitution.
  - g. The teaching of theories to promote or to criticize a religious doctrine is not permitted. Religious theories/beliefs shall not direct curriculum content.
2. Religious Holidays
  - a. The origin and significance of diverse holidays shall be presented in an unbiased manner without religious indoctrination. Holiday activities may include the singing of some holiday songs with religious content, but if songs with religious content from any religion are allowed the performance shall also include a balanced variety of music including songs representing different religions and non-religious songs. Such programs may include performances of dramas with religious themes but they may not be overtly religious and must include performances representing different religions and non-religious performances.
  - b. Neither instructional materials nor assembly programs may be used to promote, encourage or denigrate specific religious groups or religious activities.

- c. Religious celebrations outside of school shall not be endorsed or inhibited by the school district or by school personnel in school.

3. Religious Symbols

Definition: A religious symbol is any object which portrays or represents a religious belief. A religious symbol can also be an object which is so closely associated with religion(s) or with the celebration of a religious holiday that it is commonly perceived as being of a religious nature.

- a. Religious symbols from a variety of religions may be displayed or used as a teaching resource provided the primary purpose or effect is not to promote or inhibit any particular beliefs which may be associated with such symbols. They may be used as examples of a culture and/or a specific religious heritage.
- b. Teachers shall in their presentations containing religious symbols expose students to symbols and traditions from a variety of cultures.
- c. Religious symbols may be displayed for show-and-tell, reports, or class discussions as long as their appearance is volunteered by the students and as long as the symbols are removed from display upon completion of the report or discussion.

4. Performances, Ceremonies, Programs and Gatherings

- a. School programs, assemblies or gatherings sponsored by the school shall not have a religious orientation. However, seasonal programs presented by school student groups may include religious music. Such programs shall include a balanced variety of music including music representing different religions and non-religious music.
- b. School musical groups may not participate, under the auspices of the school, in religious services.

5. Any student who objects to being exposed to instruction concerning religious topics or to participating in or observing activities at school with religious themes shall be excused from the activity and provided an appropriate alternative activity, as long as doing so is feasible and consistent with the school's curriculum requirements.