

Students

Recognition and/or Observance of Religious Events, Celebrations, or Holidays

Religion is undeniably an important element in America's history and culture. An explanation of religious history and traditions plays a vital role in understanding the literature, the arts, history, and current events of a culture.

The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the program of education provided that such instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner. The selection of holidays to be recognized shall take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities, materials, and visuals shall be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences, and shall be selected carefully to avoid the excessive and unproductive use of school time. Teachers shall be especially discriminating in planning activities that are to take place immediately preceding or on a religious holiday. The use of symbols associated with religious holidays shall be permitted as a teaching aid.

Music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes (including traditional carols, seasonal songs, and classical music) shall be permitted if presented in an objective and balanced manner without sectarian indoctrination. Religious content included in student performances shall be selected on the basis of its independent educational merit and shall seek to give exposure to a variety of religious customs, beliefs, and forms of expression. Holiday programs, parties, or performances shall not become religious celebrations, or be used as a forum for religious worship, such as a devotional reading of sacred writings, or the recitations of prayers. Student participation in a program or performance which involves personally objectionable religious material or expression shall be voluntary and students are free to be excused from any such program.

Expressions of belief or non-belief initiated by individual students shall be permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech, and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities which force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or non-beliefs. No religious belief or non-belief shall be promoted or disparaged by the School District's employees in their official capacities.

Religious Observance

A student shall be released from school, as an excused absence, for the purpose of observing a religious holiday. The parent(s)/guardian(s) must give written notice to the District 5 days before the student's anticipated absence.

The parent(s)/guardian(s)'s written notification of the student's anticipated absence shall satisfy the District's requirement for a written excuse when the student returns to school.

The Superintendent shall develop and distribute to teachers appropriate procedures regarding student absences for a religious holiday which include a list of religious holidays on which students shall be excused from attendance, how teachers are notified of a student's impending absence, and the state law requirement that teachers provide the student an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement.

Graduation and Baccalaureate Exercises

The use of an invocation and/or benediction at high school graduation and/or baccalaureate exercises shall rest within the discretion of the graduating senior class.

The invocation and/or benediction, if used, shall be given by a student volunteer.

Consistent with the principle of equal liberty of conscience, the invocation and/or benediction shall be nonsectarian and nonproselytizing in nature.

LEGAL REF.: 105 ILCS 5/26-1 and 5/26-2b.

CROSS REF.: 6.70, 6.255, 7.70

Adopted: October 28, 1997