POLICY NO. 1500
Adopted: 11-27-85
Revised 10-25-23

RELIGION

POLICY:

The Board recognizes that views and opinions regarding the relationship of the school and religion are diverse. While community opinions are important in shaping policy, the Board must give primary credence to the United States and Washington State Constitutions and decisions made by the respective courts when establishing guidelines for making decisions regarding religious-related activities and practices. The board establishes the following guidelines to preserve the constitutional rights of all students:

A. Instruction about religious matters and/or using religious materials will be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional manner and will serve a secular educational purpose. History, sociology, literature, mathematics, the arts and other disciplines taught in school may have a religious dimension. Study of these disciplines, including the religious dimension, will give neither preferential nor disparaging treatment to any single religion or to religion in general and must not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes.

B. Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion will seek the same neutrality, objectivity and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, materials and activities should be sensitive to America's pluralistic society and should educate rather than indoctrinate. Instructional activities should meet the three-part test established and used by the U.S. Supreme Court to determine constitutionality:

    (1) the activity must have a secular purpose;

    (2) the activity's principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and

    (3) the activity must not excessively involve the school in religion. This constitutional restriction does not preclude a student from expressing their views relative to belief or non-belief about a religious-related issue in compositions, reports, music, art,

debate and classroom discussion, when consistent with the assignment.

All religious-related instructional materials and/or activities must relate to secular student learning goals or standards.

Staff will avoid assigning work that emphasizes the religious aspects of a holiday unless equal educational time is spent on similar religious or cultural observances or this work is part of an inclusive curriculum. Individual students should be allowed, at their own direction, to use religious personages, events or symbols as a vehicle for respectful artistic expression, if consistent with the assignment. State law prohibits staff from requiring that students reveal, analyze or critique their religious beliefs, from grading academic work on its religious expression if any, from censoring or imposing consequences on students who engage in religious expression in accordance with the law, or from imposing the religious beliefs of the staff member on students.

C. A student may decline to participate in a school activity that is contrary to their religious convictions.

D. Religious groups may rent school facilities under the policy providing for facilities rental. Activities of such groups will be clearly separated from school sponsored activities so that the school district does not support or appear to support the establishment of religion in compliance with Board Policy 1410, Community Use of School Buildings, Equipment, Grounds.

E. A student may distribute religious literature under the same conditions that other literature may be distributed on the campus provided that such distribution does not intrude on the operation of the school in compliance with Board Policy 1320, Distribution of Literature and Other Materials.

F. Material and/or announcements promoting religion may not be distributed by non-students or on behalf of groups or individuals who are not students.

G. Religious services, programs or assemblies will not be conducted in school facilities during school hours or in connection with any school sponsored or school related activity. Speakers and/or programs that convey a religious or devotional message are prohibited. This

restriction does not preclude the presentation of choral or musical assemblies which may use religious music or literature as a part of the program or assembly.

H. Musical, artistic and dramatic presentations which have a religious theme may be included in course work and programs on the basis of their particular artistic and educational value or traditional secular usage. They will be presented in a neutral, non-devotional manner, be related to the objective of the instructional program, and be accompanied by comparable artistic works of a nonreligious nature.

   Since a variety of activities is included as part of a holiday theme, care must be exercised to focus on the historical and secular aspects of the holiday rather than its devotional meanings. Music programs will not use the religious aspect of a holiday as the underlying message or theme. Pageants, plays and other dramatic activities will not be used to convey religious messages. Religious symbols such as the cross, crucifix, religious icons, Star of David, saints, and creche, if used, will be displayed in conjunction with a variety of secular holiday symbols so that the total presentation emphasizes cultural variety rather than religious significance of the holiday.

I. A student, upon the request of a parent, may be excused to participate in religious instruction for a portion of a school day provided the activity is not conducted on school property. (Credit will not be granted for such instruction.)

J. Upon receipt of a parent(s) request, a student will be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.

K. Students may wear religious attire or symbols provided they are not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.

L. As a matter of individual liberty, a student may of their own volition engage in private, non-disruptive prayer at any time not in conflict with learning activities. Staff will support a safe and inclusive environment when dealing with questions or comments around private prayers.

M. Commencement exercises will be free from sectarian influence, including invocations and benedictions.

N. There will be no school sponsorship of baccalaureate services. Interested parents and students may plan and organize baccalaureate exercises provided that the service is not promoted through the school and staff, and student participation is voluntary.

    1. No school district funds will be used for baccalaureate;

    2. Meetings for the purpose of planning or preparation for baccalaureate will not involve school staff or students during regular school hours. Private conversations are not similarly restricted;

    3. Student/staff participation in baccalaureate shall be voluntary;

    4. Information regarding baccalaureate may be disseminated on school bulletin boards and through regular means of communication for non-school related public announcements.

O. Staff should refer to the PROCEDURES for guidance on specific questions relating to religion in schools.

Students, parents and staff who are aggrieved by practices or activities conducted in the school or district may register their concern with the building principal or district superintendent.

References:

Board Policy 1410

Board Policy 1320

Legal References

U.S. Constitution First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment

Wash. Constitution Art. I, § 11

Wash. Constitution Art. 9, Sec. 4 and Art. 26

RCW 28A.600.025 Students' rights of religious expression — Duty of superintendent of public instruction to inform school districts

WAC 392-400-227 School district rules defining students' religious rights

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PROCEDURES:

The procedures outlined below will best describe the practices of the Lake Stevens School District when culturally relevant aspects of religion or religious activities are part of school instruction, programs, or activities.

GUIDELINES:

The Lake Stevens School District serves families of many cultures and religions. It is important to honor all traditions, while staying within legal boundaries and district policies regarding religion in public schools. Public schools are required to treat religion with neutrality. Neutrality means protecting the religious liberties of all students while simultaneously rejecting schools' endorsement or promotion of religion.

Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated fairly, respectfully, and in equal quantity with shared calendar cycle cultural observances, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali, and Kwanzaa. Public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberties of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about various religions as an important part of a complete education.

Each of the religions represented in our student population celebrates a variety of holidays throughout the year. Questions are often raised about how schools can recognize holidays inclusively and sensitively.

1. HOLIDAYS RECOGNIZED AT SCHOOL

   A holiday may have both religious and non-religious cultural significance. When planning activities as part of a holiday theme, staff should take care to focus on the historical and secular aspects of the holiday rather than its devotional meanings. Holiday activities, including instruction, parties, and decorations, must not have the purpose or effect of promoting or inhibiting religion.

   Balance is essential to providing a school environment that does not appear to promote any religion(s) over others. Therefore, staff is encouraged to recognize a variety of cultural and holiday celebrations, such as Labor Day, Veterans' Day, Christmas, Easter, Black History Month, United Nations Day, Hispanic Heritage Month, Lunar New Year,

and others. The school district calendar is a useful reference for relevant dates.

2. HOLIDAY DECORATIONS DISPLAYED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

   Holiday displays must have a secular purpose and must not give the impression that the school or district is affiliated with any particular religion. Primarily secular symbols such as evergreen trees and snowflakes are acceptable; however, staff is encouraged to keep these symbols to a minimum and to display them for a limited period of time. The primary focus should remain on instruction and not celebration.

   Staff are encouraged to plan to balance such displays with symbols commemorating traditions of the season, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Diwali. Symbols of *primarily religious* significance including the cross, crucifix, saints or religious icons, Star of David, and creche are not acceptable for a holiday display but are permissible as a teaching aid or resource, provided they are used only as examples of cultural or religious heritage.

   Religious symbols may be displayed only on a temporary basis as part of the academic lesson being studied. *(Florey v. Sioux Falls School District)* Students and staff do have the right to wear religious symbols (e.g. Star of David or cross jewelry) as long as they are not disruptive to the educational process.

3. CLASSROOM/SCHOOL PARTIES OR CELEBRATIONS DURING HOLIDAY TIMES

   Schools are encouraged to minimize the amount of instructional time used for parties. (A general guideline is two events per year, about one hour per event.) Seasonal celebrations are permitted with the understanding that public schools may not sponsor religious devotions, practice, or celebration. Activities must be non-devotional and focus on the secular, rather than religious, aspects of the holiday with clear language about the cultural practices or cultural heritage evident in celebrations.

4. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES WITH A HOLIDAY THEME

   The aim should be to maximize instructional time devoted to curriculum and learning. Holiday-themed activities must serve an educational purpose for all students as cultural exposure with clear connections to wider themes in the class—activities that make no students feel excluded or forced to identify with a religion they do not practice. If done, holiday activities should include all of the holidays celebrated by students in the class or school equally at the time of year they are celebrated with at least two comparative cultural connections.

5. OFFERING ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE PROHIBITED FROM PARTICIPATING IN A HOLIDAY EVENT DUE TO RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, OR IF A PARENT DOES NOT WANT THEIR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE

An alternative should always be offered for those who do not wish to participate. Minimize situations that require students to opt out of classroom or school wide activities. It is important to note that cultural holidays such as St. Patrick's Day, Halloween and Valentine's Day, which are considered by many people to be secular, are viewed by others as having religious overtones. Activities should be presented as informative of cultural heritage in a way that most students will be able to participate as in a regular school day.

6. STUDENT ASSEMBLIES OR PERFORMANCES HAVE MUSIC WITH RELIGIOUS CONTENT

   The program cannot inhibit or advance a religious belief. When choosing music for students to play or sing, it is critical to be aware of and be sensitive to students of all religions and cultural traditions. School concerts may include religious music; however, there should be selections from a variety of religions and cultural traditions. Concerts should not be dominated by religious music, especially when they coincide with a particular religious holiday.

7. MATERIAL WITH RELIGIOUS THEMES USED IN THE CLASSROOM

   The respectful and culturally appropriate use of art, drama, music, or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves a sound educational goal in the curriculum. The material should be included on the basis of its academic or aesthetic value, and not as a vehicle for promoting religious beliefs. For example, sacred music may be sung or played as part of the academic study of music. However, sensitivity is critical, and selections should be balanced among various religions and with non-religious material.

Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion in Public Schools, Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas, First Amendment Center, 2007.