

**Regulation 8230R**

**Instruction**

**RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN THE SCHOOLS**

Pursuant to Board Policy 8230, the West Irondequoit Central School District is committed to honoring the constitutional and statutory provisions regarding freedom of religion and the separation of church and state while fostering in its students a broad educational background of knowledge, skills, talents, and understandings.

This regulation is intended to guide District practices with respect to the relationship between religion and the schools. The underlying principles of Board Policy and of this regulation are that the schools may provide instruction *about* religion, but may not provide or endorse instruction for the purpose or with the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion. Furthermore, where issues regarding religion and the schools arise, school officials are to address them in a manner that is respectful and sensitive toward the religious persuasions of all members of the school community. Insofar as possible, decisions and judgments required to resolve competing and incompatible claims relating to such issues will adhere to these principles.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

No responsible educational approach to human life, history or culture can ignore the dimension of religion. Therefore, the teaching about religion, about various religions, and about the impact and influence of religion on other dimensions of human life is both appropriate and imperative. In curricular design and instructional approach, however, the distinction between providing information and understanding about religion, and promoting or inhibiting religious belief, must be maintained.

As with all subjects, students are encouraged to think critically about religion and its impact, and are free to express personal religious beliefs in assignments, artwork, individual presentations or other projects. Such student work will be judged by the academic standards of the task, free from discrimination based on its religious content. In addition, students are free to inject personal religious views into class discussion. Teachers, however, should assure that the classroom as a whole remains balanced and objective, that it does not become a channel for proselytizing, and that it honors the religious pluralism which the first amendment protects.

**Performing Arts**

As with many subjects, effective instructional techniques in the performing arts are highly participatory. Therefore, instruction in such subjects as music, drama and others may include learning, rehearsing, and performing selections that have religious content or backgrounds along with selections that do not. Teachers will apply reasonable and balanced sensitivity toward all religious beliefs in selecting material. All selections, with or without religious content, must have a secular educational purpose consistent with the curricular goals of the District. Works may not be chosen for the purpose of advancing or inhibiting religion, nor may their primary effect be to advance or inhibit religion.

**Performances**

Performance of works with religious content is permissible. However, the purpose of studying and performing such works must be for their secular artistic and/or educational value, not for their

religious content. Furthermore, programs including works with religious content must avoid exclusive or excessive focus on a particular religion, must have an overall purpose and effect that is secular, and may in no way assume the overall form of a devotional observance.

### **Seasonal Activities**

Seasonal activities associated with religious holidays offer opportunities to teach about religion and to foster understanding and respect toward religion among students. Such activities are permissible when:

- They have a secular purpose
- They have a principal or primary effect which does not advance or inhibit religion, and
- They do not foster excessive entanglement with religion

### **Individual Students/Student Groups**

Individual students and student groups have the right to engage in religious discussion and/or individual or group prayer on a voluntary basis before, during and after the school day as long as such activities conform to the rules of order in the school and do not disrupt school activities or instruction.

Student groups who wish to use school facilities to meet for the purpose of prayer or religious discussion will have the same access to school facilities as other non-curricular student groups.

The District may not sponsor religion-based student groups. School employees who supervise such groups in school may neither participate in the group's religious activity nor encourage nor discourage the participation of other students.

The right to engage in voluntary prayer or religious discussion free from discrimination does not include the right to have a captive audience listen, or to compel other students to participate. Teachers and school administrators should ensure that no student is in any way coerced to participate in religious activity.

### **Outsiders/Outside Organizations**

Outsiders and/or outside organizations are prohibited from using school premises or facilities for religious instruction or for liturgical or devotional exercises at any time.

### **Official Neutrality Regarding Religious Activity**

Teachers and school administrators, when acting in those capacities, are prohibited from soliciting or encouraging religious activity and from participating in such activity with students. Teachers and administrators are also prohibited from discouraging activity because of its religious content, and from soliciting or encouraging anti-religious activity.

**Religious Holidays/School Calendar**

In the annual development of the School District calendar, every reasonable effort will be made to give support to the free exercise of religious obligation by all students and staff members, while providing the required number of days of instruction.

When the school calendar does not take into account all of the principal days of religious obligation, students will be freely excused on such days.

At the start of the school year, the Superintendent will inform staff of religious holidays which might conflict with major examinations or other important school activities. Scheduling of examinations and activities on such days will be resolved at the building level early in the school year.

Students who must miss an examination because of religious observations will be allowed to take the examination, or an equivalent examination, at some other time and will not be penalized for doing so.

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