

Title: Religious Holidays

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 included in instruction shall take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities shall be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences and shall be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time. Teachers shall be especially judicious in planning activities that are to take place immediately preceding or on a religious holiday.

Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes (including traditional carols, seasonal songs and classical music) shall be permitted if presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. The emphasis on religious themes shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study or presentation. 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 the devotional reading of sacred writings or the recitations of prayers. A student's participation in a program or performance which is in conflict with their own religious beliefs shall be voluntary.

The use of religious symbols (e.g., a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene or other symbol that is part of a religious ceremony) shall be permitted as a teaching aid but only when such symbols are used temporarily and objectively to give information about a heritage associated with a particular religion. Secular, seasonal symbols such as a Christmas tree, Easter eggs, Halloween pumpkins, etc., can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Cross References:

604. 628

Legal References:

Iowa Code Section 279.8; U.S. Const. amend I

Approved: Mar. 1, 1994

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