

Title: Religion and the Schools

Any study of religious history and traditions shall not include preferential or derogatory treatment to any single religion or to religion in general and shall not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes. The District or its employees shall not impose a religious belief or non-belief on students.

Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion shall seek the same objectivity and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, materials and activities will be sensitive to America's pluralistic society and shall educate rather than indoctrinate. All instructional and other school-sponsored activities shall meet the three-part test established by the Supreme Court to determine constitutionality: 1) the activity must have a secular purpose, 2) the activity's primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion and 3) the activity must not foster an excessive governmental entanglement with religion.

Expressions of belief or non-belief initiated by a student shall be permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities which are indoctrinational or force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or non-beliefs. In instances where many students might naturally choose to make a religious expression, alternate activities shall be offered.

Students shall not be required to read religious books contrary to the wishes of the student's parents or guardian. Students shall not be required to enroll in a physical education course or health course, or meet requirements regarding physical activity or cardiopulmonary resuscitation course completion, if the student's parent or guardian files a written statement with the school principal that the course or requirement conflicts with the student's religious beliefs. A student shall not be required to take instruction in human growth and development if the student's parent or guardian files a written request with the school principal that the students be excused.

Parents/guardians who wish to have their child excluded from any other school activity because of religious beliefs must submit a written notification to the building principal. The Board authorizes the administration to allow the exclusion if it is not disruptive to the

Title: Religion and the Schools

educational process and it does not infringe on a compelling state or educational interest. Further, the exclusion must not interfere with other District operations.

In the written notification of the objection the parents/guardians shall:

- describe the religious beliefs involved,
- state which activities or studies violate their religious beliefs and
- state a proposed alternate activity or study.

The building principal shall have the discretion to make this determination. The factors the principal shall consider when a student requests to be excluded from a program or activity because of religious beliefs include, but are not limited to:

- staff available to supervise a student who wishes to be excluded,
- space to accommodate the student while the student is excluded,
- available approved alternative course of study or activity while the student is excluded,
- numbers of students who wish to be excluded,
- whether allowing the exclusion places the school in a position that it is supporting a particular religion and
- whether the program or activity is required for promotion to the next grade level, graduation or by state standards.

If the parent/guardian is not satisfied with the building principal's decision, an appeal may be submitted in writing to the Superintendent.

Cross References:

514, 604.1, 605, 616, 616.1, 616.2, 628

Legal References:

Iowa Code, Chapters 256.11, 279.8, 279.50(5), 280.6; 281 IAC 12.5(6); U.S. Const. amend. I.

Approved: Mar. 21, 1989

Reviewed: Apr. 9, 1998
Apr. 24, 2018
May 23, 2023

Revised: April 27, 2004
April 28, 2009
May 28, 2013