

Instruction

School Ceremonies and Observances

Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs

It is accepted that no religious belief or non-belief should be promoted by the New London Public Schools or its employees, and none should be disparaged. Instead, the New London Public Schools should encourage all students and staff members to appreciate and be tolerant of each other's religious views. The New London Public Schools should use all opportunities to foster understanding and mutual respect among students and parents, whether it involves race, culture, economic background, or religious beliefs.

This requirement of neutrality need not preclude nor hinder the public schools in fulfilling their responsibility to educate students to be tolerant and respectful of religious diversity.

The New London Public Schools recognizes that one of their educational responsibilities is to advance the students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religious heritage has played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

Therefore, the district will approach religion from an objective, curriculum-related perspective, encouraging all students and staff members to be aware of the diversity of beliefs and respectful of each other's religious and/or non-religious views. In that spirit of respect, students and staff members should be excused from participating in activities that are contrary to religious beliefs unless there are clear issues of compelling public interest that would prevent it.

Religious Observances

Based on the opinion of the Attorney General of the State of Connecticut interpreting rulings of the United States Supreme Court proscribing certain religious programs in public schools, and regardless of the personal belief or opinion of any Board of Education member, the Board declares the following to be its policy relative to oral religious exercises during school time and involving participation of publicly employed teachers and instructs the Superintendent to see that it is carried out.

Recitation of any religious prayer or reading from religious scripture shall not take place as part of the school program during the normal school day; however, the following programs are permitted:

1. Scheduling one or more periods of silent meditation.
2. Readings from speeches of great Americans or other documents of our heritage.
3. Presentations or courses about religion as a cultural source.
4. Presentations or courses in the history of religion.
5. Presentations or courses of comparative religions.
6. Presentations or courses in the study of the Bible for literary and/or historical qualities.

Absence for Religious Observation

Student absences for religious observances shall be excused. Furthermore, such absences should not prohibit receipt of attendance related awards nor impact student grades or participation in school events.

Recognition of Religious Holidays

The objective study of religious holidays provides a natural opportunity to promote an appreciation for and respect of diversity. Learning opportunities should reflect the diversity of global cultures.

1. Recognition of religious holidays will not dominate the educational program and must support curricular objectives.
2. All religions must be afforded equal dignity, but none advanced nor disparaged.
3. Decorations which are part of custom, that have no direct religious meaning may be displayed. Decorations should not promote religion nor require student participation.
4. Programs should focus on seasonal rather than religious themes' inclusive of concerts, enrichment programs and Parent-Teacher Organization sales.
5. Performances which recognize holidays must be of an artistic nature, not religious. Religious music must not dominate any school program. Program selections should not, by their nature, exclude students from participation.
6. The Cafeteria staff will consider religious dietary restrictions when planning menus (non-meat meals, limiting pork to one menu choice).
7. Parents may exclude their children from programs involving the recognition of religious holidays or if celebration is in conflict with family beliefs. A written request for exclusion should be sent to the Principal.

Silent Meditation

The Board directs that the administration shall provide for students and teachers the opportunity to observe an appropriate period of time for silent meditation at the beginning of each school day.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
10-16a Silent meditation.

10-29a Certain days to be proclaimed by governor. Distribution and number of proclamations

10-230 Flags for schoolrooms and schools

Policy adopted: December 8, 2005
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NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
New London, Connecticut