HEWLETT-WOODMERE UFSD **Policy # 4821**

( ) Required
(X) Local
(X) Notice

SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

The Board of Education recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observances in promoting patriotism and good citizenship among the students. Therefore, activities in schools commemorating national holidays such as Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Presidents' Day are encouraged.

The Board remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religion. Students, faculty, and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious of and respect the sensitivities of others. Therefore, no District-sponsored religious observances or celebrations, including, organized prayer, reading scripture or religious materials, or other activities performed in a religious context may be held on public school property.

Notwithstanding, the Board recognizes that activities related to the celebration of religious holidays present an excellent opportunity to teach about religion and foster respect and understanding among students. In addition, educational goals motivated by secular purposes cannot always filter out religious aspects and sometimes requires the presentation of material with religious themes. Therefore, activities related to the observance of religious holidays will be permitted to the extent that they are conducted in an unbiased and objective manner and focus on the origins of the holiday, its history, and the generally agreed upon meaning of the holiday observance.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort should be made to ensure that the activity is not devotional and students of all faiths can join without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs. Therefore,

1. school and class plays must not be overtly religious and church-like scenery will be avoided;
2. religious music must not entirely dominate the selection of music; and
3. program notes and illustrations must not be religious or sectarian.

The display of religious objects or symbols is also prohibited except to the extent that they are used as a teaching aid or resource to provide examples of cultural and religious heritage within the context of a short-term study in the curriculum such as world religions, art or history. Symbols which are secular and seasonal in nature, such as Santa Claus and Easter bunnies, can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Students will be given the option to be excused from participating in those parts of a program or curriculum involving a religious theme that conflicts with their own religious beliefs.

Policy References

Cross-ref:
5210, Establishing Extra-Classroom / Student Activity Organizations

Ref:
Santa Fe. Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000)
Lee v . Weissman, 112 S. Ct. 2649, 120 L. Ed. 467 (1992)
Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971)
Lynch v. Donnelly, 403 U.S. 602 (1971)
County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union of Greater Pittsburgh Chapter, 492 U.S. 573 (1989)
Florey v. Sioux Falls School District, 619 F2d 1311 (8th Cir., 1980)
Matter of Rosenbaum, 28 EDR 138 (1988)
Matter of Cromwell, 72 EDR 116 (1951)

Adopted: November 20, 2024