

## **RSU #63**

- a. NEPN/NSBA Code:** IMDC
- b. Title:** Religious Observances and Displays
- c. Author:**
- d. Replaces Policy:**
- e. Date Approved:** 10/25/2021 RSU #63
- f. Previously Approved:** 04/27/2015
- g. Policy Expiration:** Review as Needed
- h. Responsible for Review:** Superintendent
- i. Date Reviewed:** 10/06/2021 Policy Committee
- j. References:** Materials provided by MSMA, policies IMB, IMB-R, IMC, IMD, and IMBB
- k. Narrative:**

The RSU #63 Board of Directors (the Board) created this policy with a shared commitment of respect for individual religious beliefs expressed in the constitutional guarantee of religious liberty while ensuring its educational goal to advance students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religion plays in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

No religious belief or non-belief should be promoted by the District or the employees and none should be disparaged. Instead, the District encourages all students and staff to appreciate and be tolerant of each other's religious views. The District should use all opportunities to foster understanding and mutual respect among students and parents/guardians, whether it involves race, culture, economic background, or religious beliefs.

The intent of this policy and related regulations is to reflect a balance of the academic and instruction mission of our schools, the law, and legal guidelines related to the separation of church and state, the richness and diversity of our population, and sensitivity to the rights and dignity of the individual as they relate to the celebration of holidays.

### **I. Observance of Religious Holidays**

- A.** Holidays throughout the year, which have a religious and secular basis may be observed.
- B.** The historical and contemporary values and the origins of religious holidays may be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.
- C.** Music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes or basis are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs (if presented in a prudent and objective manner) and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday.

### **II. Religion in the Curriculum**

- A.** The school calendar should be prepared to minimize conflicts with religious

holidays of all faiths. Students will be granted excused absences, if requested in advance, in order to celebrate religious holiday(s) that occur on a school day.

- B.** The use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, Star of David, Crèche, symbols of Native American religion, or other symbols that are a part of a religious holiday are permitted as teaching aids or resources, provided such symbols are displayed in an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature. Religious institutions and orientations are central to human experience, past and present. An education excluding such a significant aspect would be incomplete. It is essential that teaching about – and not of – religion be conducted in a factual, objective, and respectful manner.
- C.** The District supports the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, and the arts in curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively.
- D.** The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature, and history should be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of the areas. Such studies should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs.
- E.** Student-initiated expressions to questions or assignments, which reflect their beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme, will be accommodated. For example, students are free to express religious belief or non-belief in compositions, art forms, speech, and debate, as long as such expression is done in a respectful manner.