

RELIGIOUS THEMES IN SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Board of Education supports programs which share the traditions of different people with respect for the variety of traditions. The schools must be religiously neutral and promote pluralistic tolerance. The schools are to be sensitive to the obligation to protect the development and the vulnerability of every student and should leave each student free to believe, to disbelieve, or to doubt about religion based upon the veneration of God. Faculty members have an obligation to provide quality instruction and this obligation must be met with good judgment, keeping in mind the students, the community, and the law.

To assist the faculty with decisions regarding appropriate material for the classroom or for a program of instruction, the following is offered:

1. The school may sponsor study about religions but may not sponsor the practice of religion. The teacher may expose students to religious views but not impose any particular view.
2. Classroom instruction must be academic, not devotional. The curriculum may include study about the religious beliefs of various people but should never teach a pupil what must be believed.
3. Programs should seek to inform students about various religious beliefs but should avoid making students conform to any singular belief.

CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

The several holidays throughout the school year which have a religious and a secular origin may be observed in the schools. Music, art, literature, and drama having a religious theme is permitted if presented without sectarian indoctrination. The use of religious themes is to be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced, comprehensive study or presentation and only if it is a traditional part of the heritage of the holiday being observed. Religious content to be included in student performances is to be selected on its educational and cultural merit and should give exposure to a variety of customs, beliefs, and forms of expression. Holiday performances or parties will not become religious celebrations nor be used for religious worship or the recitation of prayers. Students should be given the option to be excused from participating in those parts of a school ceremony, observance or holiday event which substantially burden their own or their parents' sincerely held religious beliefs.

Religious Themes in School Programs (Continued)**RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS**

The use of religious symbols (e.g. cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene, etc.) are permitted as teaching aids, but only when the symbols are used temporarily and to give information about the heritage associated with a particular religion. The Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Easter eggs and bunnies are examples of secular symbols. Secular symbols may be displayed in a seasonal context. To this end, the following factors shall be considered in assessing the appropriateness of a particular display within any one of the district's school buildings.

1. Whether the display serves as a teaching aid and is illustrative of the world's religious traditions and cultural heritages.
2. Whether the display is temporary in nature, coinciding with the holiday season.
3. Whether the display acknowledges our society's cultural pluralism by allowing for the inclusion of a variety of religious and/or cultural symbols.
4. The location of the display within the school building.
5. The religious intensity of the symbols displayed.

The board directs the superintendent to make final determinations about the appropriateness of individual holiday displays.

CURRICULUM

A student's absence from school to observe a religious holiday is an excused absence. Teachers and administrators are to be aware of the major religious holidays and must avoid scheduling examinations and important extracurricular events on those holidays. Subject to applicable state law, school officials exercise substantial discretion to excuse individuals from curriculum or lessons on religious grounds. Students have a federal right to be excused from lessons which substantially burden, as opposed to being merely inconsistent with, the student or student's parents' sincerely held religious beliefs. School officials, however, may neither encourage nor discourage students from seeking to be excused.

Religious Themes in School Programs (Continued)

Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such works shall be judged by ordinary academic standards or substance and relevance.

REVIEW PROCEDURE

When First Amendment questions arise, it is district policy to take reasonable and expeditious steps to resolve such issues at the district level with the participation of all interested parties. The board directs the superintendent to administer this process.

The superintendent of schools will make a final decision and send copies of it to all parties.

Policy Adopted:
June 17, 1985

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December 16, 1991

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May 23, 2022