Merchantville Board of Education 130 South Centre Street Merchantville, NJ 08109	File Code : 6141.2 Adopted : 04/17/1984 Revised : 04/25/2000 Revised : 10/13/2009 Reviewed : 07/15/2024

Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs

The board directs that no religious belief or non-belief shall be promoted in the regular curriculum or in district-sponsored courses, programs or activities, and none shall be disparaged.

However, the board recognizes that a genuine and broad secular program of education is furthered by advancement of pupils' knowledge of our society's cultural and religious heritage. Therefore, the several holidays throughout the year that have both a religious and a secular basis may be recognized in the school by use of material having secular or cultural significance.

The instructional program of the school should inform pupils of the many beliefs and customs stemming from religious, racial, ethnic and cultural heritages. Such instruction should be designed to broaden the pupils' understanding of and tolerance for the multiple ways of life enjoyed by the peoples of the world.

Songs and customs that have come to us from the various ethnic, religious and racial elements of our population should be used to broaden our pupils' awareness of the contributions that each segment has made to the composite American culture.

Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes or bases are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in an objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday.

The use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, crèche, symbols of Native American religions or other symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource, provided such symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.

Any instruction in the school which may be contrary to a pupil's religious beliefs and teachings shall be viewed as optional for the pupil.

The board shall not prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in any district school, consistent with guidance issued by the United States Department of Education and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Key Words

Religious Beliefs, Holiday, Religious Symbols

Legal References:

N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1	General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A. 18A:36-16	Rules regarding religious holidays
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20	Powers of board (county vocational schools)
N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3.1	Curriculum and instruction
N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(h)	School attendance

U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 1, 14

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L.107-110, 20 U.S.C.A. 6301 et seq.

20 U.S.C.A. 4071 - 4074 - Equal Access Act

Florey v. Sioux Falls School District, 619 F.2d. 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)

Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, (1984)

Edwards v. Aguillard, 482 U.S. 578 (1987)

Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. 577 (1992)

Cherry Hill Bd. of Ed., 838 F.Supp. 929 (D.N.J. 1993)

American Civil Liberties Union v. Blackhorse Pike Regional Board of Education, 84 F.3d 1471 (3rd Cir. 1996)

Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, 120 S.Ct. 2266 (June 19, 2000)

Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 121 U.S. 2093 (2001)

C.H. v. Oliva, 26 F.ed 198 (3rd Cir. 2000) *en banc, cert.* denied, June 18, 2001

Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, United States Department of Education, February 7, 2003

Possible Cross References:

*1330	Use of school facilities
*5113	Absences and excuses
*5127	Commencement activities
*5131	Conduct/discipline
*6115	Ceremonies and observances
*6121	Nondiscrimination/affirmative action
*6144	Controversial issues
*6161.2	Complaints regarding instructional materials

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

NJSBA File Date: 5/06