Recognition of Religious Beliefs & Customs

Adopted: 12/08/1998 **| Last Revised:** 10/17/2023 **| Last Reviewed**: 10/17/2023

The Board of Education recognizes that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in society. As appropriate for a particular course, teachers may objectively discuss the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with culture, literature, or the arts.

In order to respect each student's individual right to freedom of religious practice, religious indoctrination is clearly forbidden in the public schools. Instruction about religion shall not promote or denigrate the beliefs or customs of any particular religion or sect, nor should a preference be shown for one religious' viewpoint over another. Staff members shall be highly sensitive to their obligation not to interfere with the religious development of any student in whatever tradition the student embraces.

Staff shall not endorse, encourage, or solicit religious or anti-religious expression or activities among students during class time. As part of their official duties, staff shall not lead students in prayer or other religious activities. However, staff shall not prohibit or discourage any student from praying or otherwise expressing his/her religious belief as long as this does not disrupt the classroom.

Students may express their beliefs about religion in their homework, artwork and other class work if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards.
While teaching about religious holidays is a permissible part of the educational program, celebrating religious holidays is not allowed in the public schools. School-sponsored programs shall not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration. School and classroom decorations may express seasonal themes that are not religious in nature.

Music, art, literature, or drama programs having religious themes 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. The use of religious symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided that such symbols are displayed as an example of cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.

Policy Reference Disclaimer:
These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the Board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.

Legal References:

STATE
EDUCATION CODE
38130-38139 Civic Center Act
46014 Absences for religious purposes
51240 Excuse from instruction due to religious beliefs
51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study
51930-51939 California Healthy Youth Act

FEDERAL

UNITED STATES CODES

20 USC 4071-4074 Equal Access Act
20 USC 6061 School prayer
20 USC 7904 School prayer

MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PUBLICATION

Appendix F history social science framework for California public schools

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PUBLICATION

Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, February 2026

COURT DECISION

Mahmoud v. Taylor (2025) 606 U.S. (2025 WL 1773627)
Florey v. Sioux Falls (1980) 619 F.2d 1311
Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified School District Board of Education (2023) 82 F.4th 664
Kennedy v. Bremerton (2022) 142 S.Ct. 2407
Cole v. Oroville Union High School District (2000, 9th Cir.) 228 F.3d 1092
Lassonde v. Pleasanton Unified School District (2003, 9th Cir.) 320 F.3d 979
Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971) 403 U.S. 602

WEBSITES

CSBA District and County Office of Education Legal Services https://legalservices.csba.org/#
California Department of Education http://www.cde.ca.gov/
CSBA http://www.csba.org/
U.S. Department of Education http://www.ed.gov/

Policy Adopted: 12/08/1998
Revised: 09/21/2004 (technical)
Revised: 10/17/2023