

Teaching About Religion

The school district is required to keep the practice of religion out of the school curriculum. The board recognizes the key role religion has played in the history of the world and authorizes the study of religious history and traditions as part of the curriculum. Preferential or derogatory treatment of a single religion shall not take place.

The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the program of education provided that such instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner; has a secular purpose; is not intended to advance or inhibit religion; is not preferential or derogatory towards any particular religion(s), and does not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.

The selection of holidays to be recognized or studied shall take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities shall be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences and shall be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time. Teachers shall be especially discriminating in planning activities that are to take place immediately preceding or on a religious holiday.

Music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes (including traditional carols, seasonal songs, and classical music) shall be permitted if presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. The emphasis on religious themes shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study or presentation. Religious content included in student performances shall be selected on the basis of its independent merit, and shall seek to give exposure to a variety of religious customs, beliefs, and forms of expression. Holiday programs, parties, or performances shall not become religious celebrations, or be used as a forum for religious workshop, such as the devotional reading of sacred writings or the recitations of prayers. Student participation in a program or performance which involves personally offensive religious material or expression shall be voluntary.

The use of religious symbols (e.g., a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene, or other symbol that is part of a religious ceremony) shall be permitted as a teaching aid, but only when such symbols are used temporarily and objectively to give information about a heritage associated with a particular religion. The Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Easter eggs, and Easter bunnies are secular, seasonal symbols and as such can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Expressions of belief or non-belief initiated by individual students shall be permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech, and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities which are indoctrinational or force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or non-beliefs. In instances where many students might naturally choose to make a religious expression, alternate activities shall be offered.

Approved: October 19, 1998

Revised: September 29, 2015