

BOARD OF EDUCATION – Operations and Procedures

Ceremonies, Holiday Displays and Observances

The Board of Education recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observances in promoting patriotism and good citizenship among students. Therefore, activities in schools commemorating national holidays such as Memorial Day, Thanksgiving and President's Day are encouraged. The Board shall foster and future in students a respect for, and an ability to relate to, other people. In order to reach this goal, students need to learn to appreciate the diversity of mankind's historic and cultural heritage and to be aware of other cultures, values and beliefs that are different from his/her own. To that end, the Board encourages activates in schools relating to cultural holidays, such as Kwanzaa and celebrations of cultural heritage from other nations.

The Board remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religion. Staff members, when acting in such capacity, are representatives of the District and are prohibited from soliciting or encouraging religious activity (such as prayer) or anti-religious activity, and from leading or participating in such activities with students. Students, faculty and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious of and respect and sensitives of others.

Teaching About Religion

The Board recognizes the District's responsibility to teach students about religion's role as a vital force in the development of civilizations, as well as to foster respect for individual religious beliefs. In addition, the Board believes that it is the duty of the District to ensure that every student full understands the principle of religious freedom that is part of this country's heritage. The Board also recognizes that the District may not provide religious instruction, but may teach about religion.

Therefore, the Board encourages instructional programs that:

1. Focus on the role that religion has played in history and/or in the development of a society or culture; and
2. Educate students about the principle of religious liberty as one of the central elements of freedom and democracy.

Ceremonies, Holiday Displays and Observances (2)

Religious and Cultural Holidays, Ceremonies, and Observances

The Board recognizes that activities related to the celebration of religious and cultural holidays, including but not limited to Christmas, Chanukah, Easter, Ramadan, Passover and Kwanzaa, present an excellent opportunity to teach students about religious and cultural traditions and beliefs and foster respect and understanding among students. In addition, educational goals motivated by secular purposes may include religious aspects, and sometimes require the presentation of material with religious themes. Therefore, instruction and activities related to the observance of religious holidays is permitted as long as they are conducted in an unbiased and objective manner, focus on the origins and cultural and historical significance of the holiday, and the generally agreed upon meaning of the holiday observance. Such teaching may neither promote nor disparage religious belief, and must avoid the implication that the religious doctrines on which such holidays are based have the support, endorsement or disapproval of the District or school personnel.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort should be made to ensure that the activity does not involve the practice of rituals and religion and students of all faiths can participate without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs. Therefore,

1. School and class plays, including scenery, shall not be overtly religious and shall reflect various heritages, where appropriate;
2. Seasonal programs may include religious music; however, religious music shall not entirely dominate the selection of music and an effort shall be made to be balanced and inclusive.
3. Program notes and illustrations shall not be religious or sectarian;
4. Holiday cultural decorations may be displayed in school buildings, but not in individual classrooms;
5. Secular decorations may be used in classrooms and hallways (e.g., candy canes, Santa Claus, dreidel); and
6. There shall be no mandated “grab bags.”

Students shall 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.

Ceremonies, Holiday Displays and Observances (3)**Religious Symbols**

Religious symbols are sacred to particular faiths and belong primarily in a place of worship or home. Historically, religious symbols have been an integral part of society and cultures, and use in the school must be in the classroom for temporary periods of time and only when appropriate for educational purposes. Religious symbols include but are not limited to Star of David, Creche, Cross, Buddha, Crucifix, Menorah with candles or lights.

Holiday religious symbols must be used primarily for educational purposes. Their meaning should be explained to students with sensitivity and respect for the feelings and beliefs of individuals. The Board only authorizes the use of religious objects or symbols in the classroom, on a temporary basis, as a teaching aid or resource to provide examples of cultural and religious heritage in conjunction with teaching about religions.

Holiday religious symbols are sometimes cultural symbols that have no religious significance themselves but have been allowed to become associated with a particular religious belief in connection with holiday celebrations. Holiday cultural symbols may be used for decorative purposes in the schools and include but are not limited to Santa Claus, Menorah (as long as candles are lit all at once, as opposed to one for each night Chanukah), Christmas trees, wreaths, Easter eggs, Kinara, Star and Crescent, candy canes and dreidels.

The Board permits the display and use of holiday cultural symbols within the school buildings, at the discretion of the Building Principal, as long as such display is balanced and inclusive, illustrative of the world's religious traditions and cultural heritages, temporary in nature, coinciding with the holiday season and does not impose a risk to the health and safety of students and staff. The Board directs that the Superintendent of Schools make final determinations about the appropriateness of individual holiday displays.

District Calendar

Out of respect for a student's observance of religious holidays, teachers will be sensitive to the needs of the students by allowing them to make up all new work, homework and tests without penalty. Parents/guardians are encouraged to notify the school prior to the absence in order to assist the staff in instructional planning and in meeting the needs of student.

1. To the extent possible, school events will not be scheduled on religious holidays, including events of observance.
2. In scheduling graduations, the school administration will be sensitive to the religious observances and restrictions of all students.

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