

SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

The Board of Education recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observances in promoting patriotism and good citizenship among the students. Therefore, activities in schools commemorating national holidays, such as Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Presidents Day, are encouraged.

The Board, consistent with the requirements of Federal and New York State laws and regulations, remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religious beliefs. Students, faculty, and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious of and respect the sensitivities of others. Accordingly, no religious celebrations such as prayer, Bible, Koran, or any other religious reading, meditation to a higher being, witchcraft, chanting mantras, séances, casting of spells, astrology, or other activities performed in a religious context may be held in the buildings during the regular student instructional day.

Notwithstanding, the Board recognizes that activities related to the celebration of religious holidays may present an excellent opportunity to teach about religion and foster respect and understanding among students. In addition, educational goals motivated by secular purposes cannot always filter out religious aspects, and sometimes require the presentation of material with religious themes. However, such instruction shall not be designed to promote an ancillary message to students that they do not fall within the favored class of the community. Therefore, activities related to the observance of religious holidays will be permitted to the extent that they foster appropriate educational goals and are conducted in an unbiased and objective manner. Instruction meeting this criteria will focus on the origins of the holiday, its history, and the generally agreed upon meaning of the holiday observance.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort should be made to ensure that the activity is not devotional and students of all faiths can join without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs.

The Superintendent will develop an administrative regulation on cultural diversity, religion in the schools and school ceremonies and observances.

Cross-Reference: 4313, Teaching About Religion

Reference: Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000)
Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971)
Lynch v. Donnelly, 403 U.S. 602 (1971)
County of Allegheny v. ACLU, 492 U.S. 573 (1989)
Matter of Rosenbaum, 28 EDR 138 (1988)
Matter of Cromwell, 72 State Dept. Rep. 116 (1951)

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CULTURAL DIVERSITY: RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

The Board of Education acknowledges the importance of religion to the understanding of society and the richness of the human experience. In approaching the teaching about religion in the school, the District will be guided by three concepts when making decisions about the appropriateness of activities for inclusion in the school program:

1. the activity should have a secular purpose;
2. the activity should neither advance nor inhibit religion; and
3. the activity must not foster an excessive entanglement of “government” with religion.

Fostering the development of knowledge and respect for the rights of all cultural and religious groups is a continuing goal of the District.

Opportunities to learn about cultural and religious traditions should be provided within the framework of the curriculum. Information about religious and cultural holidays and traditions, focusing on how and when they are celebrated, their origins and histories, should be part of this instruction. This educational opportunity should be handled with great care, sensitivity and respect for the feelings and beliefs of individuals.

An environment should be created and encouraged where students of various ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable in sharing comments about their religious and cultural traditions. No student should be singled out to share or participate in such discussions solely on the basis of that student’s identification with the cultural/religious heritage being addressed. A student’s preference not to share or participate in such discussions should be honored and respected without penalty.

A. School Activities Related to Religious Holidays or Themes

1. School activities related to the teaching about religious holidays or themes must be consistent with the District’s curriculum.
2. In planning school activities related to the teaching about religious holidays or themes, special effort must be made to ensure that the activity is not devotional and that students of all faiths can join without feeling they are betraying their own beliefs.
3. In planning school activities related to the teaching about religious holidays or themes, age-appropriate activities are encouraged within the framework of the curriculum. Teaching about religious and cultural holidays may include such special activities as parties and special foods, if they reinforce educational goals.

B. Symbols in the Schools

The purpose of using religious symbols should be to teach about religious concepts and traditions, and to convey historical or cultural content, not to promote or celebrate religious concepts, events, or holidays.

1. Classroom use on a temporary basis and/or display of religious symbols is permitted as a teaching resource or aid only within the framework of the curriculum. Library displays that are used to educate and heighten awareness about a variety of topics will be permitted. Such use and/or display should provide an environment whereby students of all faiths can participate without betraying their own beliefs.
2. Even when it may be compatible with the instructional setting, a display outside the classroom whose themes focus on the religious holiday(s), tradition(s), or symbol(s), of any religion is not appropriate.
3. Individual student-initiated expressions in response to any given project may take the form of religious writing, musical composition or artwork. These creations will be guided by the teacher and may be displayed in the school in the same manner as other student created expressions. They are to be evaluated in the same manner as any other student product.
4. Individual expression of religious belief by means of wearing of religious symbols on the person or on clothing is a protected expression of faith.

C. Music in the Schools

The purpose of using religious music should be to teach musical concepts, to convey historical and cultural content, or to create aesthetic experiences in a setting which emphasizes artistic expression and educational value, not celebration of faith.

1. Religious music should be appropriate for performance at any time during the school year.
2. Musical programs prepared for or presented by student groups as an outcome of the instructional program should not be religious or religious holiday oriented. However, seasonal programs may include religious music. On such occasions that religious music is included in a seasonal program, the music should not dominate the program and should be balanced and inclusive.
3. Parents/guardians and students should be informed that requests for the student to not participate in singing or playing religious music will be respected. Such requests should be made by the parents/guardians as early as possible in the school year so that students may fulfill course requirements in another way without penalty.

D. Schedule

Out of respect for students' 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 the student.

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

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