

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Series 600

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION REGULATION- RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS No. 603.8R1

The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the education program provided that the instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner. The selection of holidays to be studied will take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities will be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences and will be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time. Teachers will be especially careful 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) will be permitted if presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. The emphasis on religious themes is only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study or presentation. Religious content included in student performances is selected on the basis of its independent educational merit and will seek to give exposure to a variety of religious customs, beliefs and forms of expression. Holiday programs, parties or performances will not become religious celebrations or be used as a forum for religious worship, such as the devotional reading of sacred writings or the recitations of prayers.

The use of religious symbols (e.g. a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene, tablets, chalices, Buddha or other symbol that is part of a religious ceremony) are 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 or wreath, Santa Claus, Lion of Judah, Easter eggs, Easter bunnies, Dreidel, and Halloween decorations are secular, seasonal symbols and as such can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Expressions of belief or nonbelief initiated by individual students is permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities which are indoctrinate or force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or nonbeliefs.

Permissible activities in regard to religious expression.

- 1 *Curriculum.* Teachers shall prepare and teach lessons throughout the year and throughout the curriculum that:
 - a. Approach religion as *academic* not devotional
 - b. Strive for student *awareness* of religions not acceptance of religions
 - c. Study *about* religion, but do not practice religion in the classroom

- d. *Expose* students to diversity of religious views, not impose any particular view
 - e. *Educate* about a variety of religions, not promote or denigrate religion
 - f. *Inform* students about various beliefs, not conform students to any particular belief
 - g. *Demonstrate* the impact of economic, social, political, and cultural effects of religion throughout history
 - h. Are age appropriate
- 2 *Student prayer.* Individual or collective student prayers are permissible so long as the prayer does not disrupt or impede the educational mission of the district. Prayer led by or at the behest of a public school official, while serving in that capacity is in violation of the First Amendment.
- 3 *Moment of Silence.* A collective moment of silence, out of respect for a tragedy is permissible.
- 4 *Greetings.* Staff and students alike are free to wish each other a sincere “Merry Christmas,” “Happy Hanukkah,” “Joyous Kwanzaa,” etc., and *they may do so within the walls of a public school building.*
- 5 *Secular aspects of traditionally religious holidays.* The secular or commercial aspects of Easter, Halloween, and Christmas are, to say the least, undeniably a large part of many lives. To that end, the non-religious aspects of these holidays may be part of students’ lives at school to the extent that they do not otherwise violate school rules. For example, the following are permissible activities (inasmuch as they do not violate the First Amendment):
- a. Hanging pictures of reindeer, bells, or other non-religious symbols.
 - b. Sponsoring a “giving tree” on which students may hang hats, mittens, scarves, other items for donation to less fortunate persons.
 - c. Sponsoring sleigh rides.
 - d. Wearing holiday attire and religious symbols so long as they don’t interfere with the learning environment.

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