

## **Instruction**

### **RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS**

The Governing Board recognizes that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in history. It is both proper and important for teachers to objectively discuss the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with society, literature or the arts. The Board expects that such instruction will identify principles common to all religions and foster respect for the multiple creeds practiced by the peoples of the world.

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 must not favor, promote or demean the beliefs of customs of any particular religion or sect. Staff shall be highly sensitive to its 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. They shall not lead students in prayer or participate in student-initiated prayer. 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 written and oral reports if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards, free of discrimination based on religious content.

#### **Religious Holidays**

Whereas teaching about religious holidays is 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.

(cf. 5145.2 – Freedom of Speech/Expression)  
(cf. 6144 – Controversial Issues)  
(cf. 6145.5 – Student Organizations and Equal Access)  
(cf. 5113 – Absences and Excuses)

Legal Reference:

#### **EDUCATION CODE**

51240 Excuse from health instruction and family life and sex education due to religious belief  
51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of student

**RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS (continued)**

**UNITED STATES CODE, TITLE 20**

6061 School Prayer

Lemon v. Kurtzman, (1971) 403 U.S. 602

Walleye v. Gaffer, (1985) 472 U.S. 38

Management Resources:

“Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law” April 1995

“Religious Expression in Public Schools” United States Department of Education, August 1995

(5/85 12/88) 6/96

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Upon written request of the parent/guardian, a student shall be excused from any art of health, family life or sex education which conflicts with the religious training, beliefs, or personal moral convictions of the parent/guardian or student. (Education Code 51240)

Alternate activities shall be provided for students who are so excused.

Staff shall make every effort to avoid scheduling examinations, school-sponsored trips, special laboratories, picture-taking days and class parties on established religious holidays.

#### **Programs and Exhibits**

When school programs and exhibits are in any way related to instruction about religion or religious holidays, the following guidelines shall be observed:

1. The principal or designee shall ensure that school-sponsored programs are not, or do not have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration.
2. The principal or designee shall participate in planning the program or exhibit and shall be kept informed of its development.
3. Program or exhibit planners shall take into consideration the diverse religious faiths represented in the community, student body and staff.
4. Students and staff whose beliefs prohibit their participation in a program shall be excused without penalty, and an alternate activity any such students.

(cf. 6142.1 – Family Life/Sex Education)

(cf. 0410 – Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities)