

Adopted: 8/22/00

Revised: _____

609 RELIGION

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to identify the status of religion as it pertains to the programs of the school district.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. The school district shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or non belief. Instead, the school district encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for and tolerance of each other's views.
- B. The school district also recognizes that religion has had and is having a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization.
- C. The school district recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase its students' knowledge and appreciation of music, art, drama, and literature, which may have had a religious basis or origin as well as a secular importance.
- D. The school district supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.
- E. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of various religions, holidays, customs and beliefs may be explained in an unbiased and nonsectarian manner.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. It shall be the responsibility of the Director to ensure that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs and holidays in the school district is in keeping with the following guidelines:
 - 1. The proposed activity must have a secular purpose.

2. The primary objective of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.
 3. The activity must not foster excessive governmental relationships with religion.
- B. The Director is granted authority to develop and present for school board review and approval directives and guidelines for the purpose of providing further guidance relative to the teaching of materials related to religion if needed.

IV. OBSERVANCES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

When religious holidays are recognized, they should be as closely related to the curriculum as possible. The educational aspects should be emphasized as opposed to the religious aspects. The educational values should be such that they could be taught as a part of the curriculum at any time. Teaching them at the time of the traditional observance should only be for purposes of relevancy.

V. RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Definition of religious symbols: a religious symbol is any object which suggests the existence of a supreme being or universal being, deity or force. Example of such religious symbols are the Cross, Menorah, Crescent, Star of David, Nativity scenes, and any other symbols which are a part of a religious celebration.

Other symbols which may be of seasonal or geographic significance are the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Menorah, Dreidel, Shofar, Easter eggs and Easter bunnies. Any of the aforementioned symbols may be displayed as a part of a broad cultural study and left on display for the time their presence is necessary to the study.

VI. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS MUSIC IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Musical programs in which students participate and/or are prepared for or presented during school hours should not represent religious ceremonies. Music programs, however, whether containing seasonal themes or not, may include religious music. An example of an acceptable program would include secular winter songs and holiday music from around the world which includes religious and secular seasonal music from various lands and religions.

A volunteer group practicing outside school hours may present a program of religious music in the school outside of school hours. However, these groups would be limited by the rules governing the use of school facilities.

At all levels of education, the study of religious music as a part of a music appreciation course, musical experience, or as part of a study of various lands and cultures is appropriate as is the study of secular music.

VII. RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION WITHIN THE SCHOOLS

The distribution of literature, display of posters, and groupings and assemblies of students which encourage or oppose religious or non-religious thought or action shall be governed by the same rules which apply to their secular counterparts. For example, regulations concerning the dissemination of political literature shall also govern the dissemination of religious and non-religious literature.

Religious and non-religious themes and symbols may be used in independent, student-initiated projects in art, shop, or other school activities such as reports and class discussions as a mode of personal expression or in an informative capacity. The instructor should exercise caution so as not to either encourage or discourage religious or non-religious themes to the advantage or disadvantage of any belief or other appropriate secular projects. Exhibition of such works shall be given prominence and duration equal to that of any comparable project.

VIII. THE SCHOOL CALENDAR

The school calendar should be prepared so as to minimize conflicts with the traditional religious holidays.

CHURCH/FAMILY NIGHT OR EVENING FUNCTIONS

Consistent with the general welfare of the schools and its activity program, the administration and teachers shall not schedule school activities on school nights past 10:30 p.m. Wednesday night shall be reserved for church or family activities. No evening activity, should be held without the approval of the administration. In any event, all activities must have faculty supervision. Any deviation from these guidelines must have the approval of the Director.

Legal References:

U.S. Constitution, First Amendment

Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S.602, 91 S.Ct. 2105, 29 L.Ed.2d 745 (1971)

Florey v. Sioux Falls Sch. Dist. 49-5, 619 F.2d 1311 (8th Cir.) *cert. denied*, 449 U.S. 987, 101 S.Ct. 409, 66 L.Ed.2d 251 (1980)

Cross References:

Policy 801 (Equal Access to Facilities of Secondary Schools)