

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 President's Day are encouraged.

The Board remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religion. Students, faculty and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious and respectful of the sensitivities of others. Therefore, no organized religious celebrations including prayer, bible reading or other activities performed in a religious context may be held on public school property except in accordance with the Equal Access Act.

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 materials with religious themes. 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, focusing 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. Therefore,

1. school and class plays shall not be overtly religious and religious scenery will be avoided;
2. religious music shall not dominate the selection of music in school performance; and
3. program notes and illustrations shall not be religious or sectarian.

The display of religious objects or symbols is also prohibited except to the extent that it is used as a teaching aid or resource to provide examples of cultural and religious heritage within the context of a short-term study in the curriculum such as world religions, art or history. Symbols which are secular and seasonal in nature, such as menorahs, Santa Claus, Easter bunnies, and Christmas trees can be displayed in a seasonal context without reference to religion.

Students shall be given the option to be excused from participating in those parts of a program or curriculum involving a religious theme which conflicts with their own religious beliefs.

In addition, prayers of invocation and benediction may not be included as part of school district ceremonies such as graduations, even if attendance at such functions is not mandatory.

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