

Sample School Board Policy

_____ School District
Board Policy # _____

Instruction

Religious Beliefs, Customs, and Expression

The Board of Education recognizes that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in society. In accordance with the law and the guidance published by the United States Department of Education, it is the policy of (***School District***) to allow students and employees to engage in the expressions of personal religious views or beliefs within the parameters of current law and to maintain appropriate respect regarding religious freedoms in the school environment.

As appropriate for a particular course, teachers may objectively discuss the influence of religion using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with culture, literature, or the arts.

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 shall not promote or denigrate the beliefs or customs of any religion or sect, nor should a preference be shown for one religious' viewpoint over another. Staff shall be sensitive to their obligation not to interfere with the religious development of any student in whatever tradition the student embraces.

As part of their official duties, staff shall not lead students in prayer or other religious activities. However, staff shall not prohibit or discourage any student from praying or otherwise expressing his/her religious perspectives as long as this does not disrupt the classroom.

Students may express their religious perspectives in their homework, artwork, class discussion, and other classwork if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards.

While teaching about religious holidays is a permissible part of the educational program, observing holidays as religious events is not allowed in the public schools. School-sponsored programs can recognize the religious aspects of holidays but shall not be, nor have the effect of being a religious observance.

Music, art, literature, or drama programs having religious themes are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in an objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage. The use of religious symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided that such symbols are displayed as an example of cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.

Legal References:

51938 United States Code, Title 20 Sections: 4071-4074; 6061; 7904 Court Decisions: Lassaonde v. Pleasanton Unified School District, (2003, 9th Cir.); Cole v. Oroville Union High School District, (2000, 9th Cir.); Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971, Supreme Court); Lynch v. Donnelly, (1984, Supreme Court); Florey v. Sioux Falls School District (1979, 8th Cir.).