

CEREMONIES, HOLIDAY DISPLAYS AND OBSERVANCES

The Constitution of the United States concurrently protects religious freedom and mandates the separation of church and state. As the public schools are considered part of the “state”, they must be hospitable to students of all faiths and no faith and should teach an understanding of, and respect for, all religions and beliefs.

The school board recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observances in promoting patriotism and good citizenship among students. Therefore, activities in schools commemorating national holidays such as Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Veteran’s Day are encouraged. The schools shall foster and nurture in students a respect for, and an ability to relate to all people. In order to reach this goal, students need to learn to appreciate the diversity of mankind’s historic and cultural heritage and to be aware of other cultures, values, and beliefs that are different from their own.

The board remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religion. Staff members, when acting in such capacity, are representatives of the district and are prohibited from promoting religious activity (such as prayer) or antireligious activity, and from leading or participating in such activities with students. Students, faculty, and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious of and respect the sensitivities of others.

As part of the educational process, the school board believes and supports that the school district should be inclusive. The board’s definition of ‘inclusive’ in this policy is as follows: Over the entire school year (and not necessarily at any one given point in time) the curriculum programs and/or educational events are inclusive of various cultures and beliefs in activities or symbols.

Religious Holidays, Ceremonies and Observances

The board recognizes that activities related to the celebration of religious holidays present an excellent opportunity to teach students about religious and cultural traditions and beliefs and foster respect and understanding among students. Therefore, instruction and activities related to the awareness of religious holidays, or having religious themes, is permitted as long they are conducted in a manner that educates students and not to promote any religion, are presented in an unbiased and objective manner, and focus on the origins, cultural, and historical significance of the holiday.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort



should be made to ensure that the activity does not involve the practice of rituals and religion and students of all faiths or no faith can participate without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs.

Students shall be given the option to be excused from participating in those parts of a school ceremony, observance or holiday event, which are inconsistent with their own or their parents' religious beliefs without penalty. No student shall be singled out to share or participate in such discussions solely on the basis of that student's identification with the religious/cultural heritage being addressed.

Religious Symbols

Religious symbols are sacred to particular faiths and belong primarily in a place of worship or home. If holiday religious symbols are used, they must be used for educational purposes. Their meaning should be explained to students with sensitivity and respect for the feelings and beliefs of all individuals.

Holiday religious symbols are sometimes cultural symbols that have no religious significance themselves but have been allowed to become associated with a particular religious belief in connection with holiday celebrations. Holiday cultural symbols may be used for decorative purposes in the schools if they are used as part of the curriculum and/or have an educational component.

The board permits the display and use of holiday cultural symbols within the school buildings, at the discretion of the building principal, as long as such display is balanced and Inclusive to students of all faiths or no faith, is illustrative of the world's religious traditions and cultural heritages, temporary in nature, coinciding with the holiday season, and does not impose a risk to the health and safety of students and staff.

Adopted 2008
Reviewed 2016

