

Ceremonies and Observances

Decisions about what to do in schools during times of religious celebrations should begin with the understanding that public schools are not allowed to sponsor or promote religion. This is a constitutional issue – separation of church and state – and is not up to individual discussion.

The issue of religious celebrations is especially difficult during the month of December. There are numerous celebrations centered around this time of year, including Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. It is possible to acknowledge and teach about each holiday as it approaches, provided there is a balance and equality in the approach, with no one religion receiving any special consideration. As long as the line is not crossed between “teaching” about a holiday and “endorsing” the religion, this is acceptable, but no public school should promote any religious observance.

Student assemblies or classroom parties need to celebrate all holidays if they are to be held. Displays also need to be all inclusive, reflecting the many cultures and religions of our students.

- *Principals will be responsible for adding an alternate activity when needed for non-participants.*
- *Appropriate classroom parties and decorations should not be discouraged because they foster friendship and camaraderie.*
- *This policy states that all must respect diverse cultures and traditions, but whatever standards are set must be reviewed each year with the principals who in turn will bring this information to their staff.*

Separation of Church and State

In accordance with the mandate of the Constitution of the United States prohibiting the establishment of religion it is the policy of this Board that the public schools will, at all times and in all ways, be neutral in matters of religion.

This requirement of neutrality need not preclude nor hinder the public schools in fulfilling their responsibility to educate students to be tolerant and respectful of religious diversity. The district also recognizes that one of its educational responsibilities is to advance the students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religion has played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

Therefore, the district will approach religion from an objective, curriculum-related perspective, encouraging all students and staff members to be aware of the diversity of beliefs and respectful of each other's religious and/or non-religious views. In that spirit of respect, students and staff members should be excused from participating in activities that are contrary to religious beliefs unless there are clear issues of compelling public interest that would prevent it.

Ceremonies and Observances, continued

As required by the No Child Left Behind Act, the Superintendent will, by October 1 of each year, certify in writing to the state that students of the District are not prevented by policy or rule from participating in constitutionally protected prayer. The Superintendent will ensure that the staff, parents/guardians, and students are made aware of the parameters of acceptable religious speech and actions. The Superintendent will also distribute guidelines to each school concerning religion in the schools, after such guidelines/ regulations have been approved by the Board attorney and reviewed by the Board.

Holiday Celebration and Observances

The building Principal is responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy. Pertinent information will be included in the student, parent, and staff handbooks.

Absence for Religious Observation

Student absences for religious observances shall be excused. Furthermore, such absences should not prohibit receipt of attendance related awards nor impact student grades or participation in school events.

Recognition of Religious Holidays

The objective study of religious holidays provides a natural opportunity to promote an appreciation for and respect of diversity. Learning opportunities should extend beyond Judeo-Christian beliefs; reflecting the diversity of global cultures.

1. Recognition of religious holidays will not dominate the educational program and must support curricular objectives.
2. All religions must be afforded equal dignity, but none advanced nor disparaged.
3. Decorations which are part of custom, that have no direct religious meaning (Christmas tree, Menorah) may be displayed. Tree decoration should not promote religion nor require student participation.
4. Programs should focus on seasonal rather than religious themes' inclusive of concerts, enrichment programs, and Parent-Teacher Organization sales.
5. Performances which recognize holidays must be of an artistic nature, not religious. Religious music must not dominate any school program. Program selections should not, by their nature, exclude students from participation.
6. The Cafeteria staff will consider religious dietary restrictions when planning menus (non-meat meals, limiting pork to one menu choice).
7. Parents may exclude their children from programs involving the recognition of religious holidays or if celebration is in conflict with family beliefs. A written request for exclusion should be sent to the Principal.

Ceremonies and Observances, continued

Silent Meditation

The Board directs that the administration shall provide for students and teachers the opportunity to observe an appropriate period of time for silent meditation at the beginning of each school day.

Pledge of Allegiance

Students will be offered the opportunity to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag at least once during each school day. Participation in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance will be voluntary. Students may refuse to participate in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance for any reason, including religious, political, philosophical, or personal reasons. If a student chooses not to participate, he/she may stand or sit in silence.



Legal Reference:

Connecticut General Statutes
10-16a Silent meditation.
10-29a Certain days to be proclaimed by governor. Distribution and number of proclamations
10-230 Flags for schoolrooms and schools
PA 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the
Pledge of Allegiance
No Child Left Behind Act