

2270 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

The Board of Education recognizes that religious precepts have enriched issues of morality and greatly contributed to the arts, literature and music, and that an understanding of religions and their contributions to the advancement of civilization are important to the thorough education of young people. The Board also acknowledges that instructional and resource materials approved for use in the schools of the district may contain religious references or moral issues that have traditionally been the focus of religious concern. However, the Board appreciates that religious belief and disbelief are matters of personal conviction and that the pupils of this district are protected from the establishment of religion in the schools by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article I, Paragraph 4 of the New Jersey State Constitution.

Accordingly, no devotional exercises or displays of a religious nature that advance or inhibit any religious belief will be permitted in this district nor shall instructional activities be permitted that advance or inhibit any particular religious belief. The Board directs that teaching staff members employing materials that may have some religious basis must be neutral in their approach and avoid using the instructional materials to advance or inhibit religion in any way. Pupils should receive unbiased instruction in the schools so that they may privately accept or reject the knowledge so gained, in accordance with their own religious tenets.

No pupil shall be excused from attendance in a required course of study on the grounds that the instruction therein interferes with the free exercise of his or her religion, unless the Superintendent or designee has approved a written request from the pupil's parent or guardian that his or her son or daughter be excused from a specific portion of health, family life or sex education, or another required course because it is inconsistent with the family's religious beliefs and the school has approved an alternative educational program for the pupil.

U.S.	Consti. Amend. 1
N.J.	Consti. (1947) Art. 1, para. 4
N.J.S.A.	18A:35-4.6 et seq.; 18A:36-16
N.J.S.A.	18A:35-4.7

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Approved: January 23, 2001

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R 2270 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

Treatment of religious holidays should be as follows:

A. In the school buildings

1. Activities related to religious holidays in the buildings should be modest, kept in perspective and should not permeate or overwhelm the school. Such activities should be temporary and have an educational purpose.
2. Schools may temporarily display symbols associated with religious holidays as part of the recognition of and teaching activity about such holidays. A balance should be present between or among symbols of different religious holidays. Seasonal decorations are encouraged. Symbols with high religious content should not be displayed for decorative purposes.

One way to recognize the holiday season at the building level is through a display of symbols such as the Christmas tree and the menorah (as well as symbols from other religions) in one area, set aside for this purpose and labeled appropriately (i.e. "Traditional Symbols of Religious Holidays," "Symbols of Religious Holidays Celebrated by Our Students," etc.) If religious symbols are used, any such display should include symbols from a variety of religions.

Symbols of a religious nature which represent a single religion should not be displayed alone. They should always be accompanied by symbols of other religions -- particularly those practiced in our community.

3. Individual buildings may include religious music in their holiday concerts in accordance with the Board Policy on religion in the schools. When songs relating to religious holidays are included, music from different religions should be represented in a balanced manner. Songs with highly religious language should not be included. An exception may be made for classical works of substantial aesthetic value.

B. In the classrooms

1. Religious holidays may be recognized in the classroom and used as opportunities to teach about different religions and cultures. When teachers choose to discuss religious holidays, the special days of different religions should be included in a balanced manner.

When explaining or discussing religious holidays, teaching should be done in an unbiased, objective and sensitive manner.

2. It is important to recognize that symbols play different roles in various religions and to recognize the difference between decorations which are more seasonal in nature and decorations which are more religious in nature.

For bulletin boards and classroom displays, seasonal items or non-religious symbols are appropriate. These include such things as banners or signs with seasonal greetings, bows, snowflakes, lights or candles, candy canes, bells, dreidels and other non-religious symbols.

Unless they are used as part of a specific lesson about religion, items which carry significant religious meaning should not be used for classroom displays. Such items include: crèches, menorahs, wreaths, Christmas trees, stars of David or Bethlehem, angels, words such as Alleluia or Glory; Bishop St. Nicholas, the three Kings, the cross or statues of Jesus.

Questions about symbols or items for display should be discussed with the building principal.

3. Symbols related to religious holidays should not be used in required instructional exercises, apart from lessons about religion or religious holidays. For example, symbols related to a religious holiday should not be used for required math lessons, art projects, reading lessons, etc.
4. Music, art and literature having religious origins or religious themes may be taught if they have educational value and are taught for educational purposes. Such music, art or literature must be presented with sensitivity to students of different faiths. Music, art and literature from a variety of religious backgrounds should be included.

PROGRAM
R 2270
Religion in the Schools

Page 3 of 3

5. Pupils may be excused from any classroom activity if the Superintendent has approved a request by the pupil's parent or guardian that the pupil be excused because the religious content of the activity is objectionable and inconsistent with the family's religious beliefs.

6. Pupils are discouraged from exchanging gifts in school during the December holiday season as well as any other time during the school year. The district has a long-standing policy of discouraging pupils from giving gifts to staff members on holidays, as well as at any other time during the year.

C. Annual Notification to Staff

The Superintendent shall annually notify the staff about the requirements of policy and regulation 2270.

In Effect: January 23, 2001