
RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

The Board directs that teachers and administrators are prohibited from encouraging or discouraging activity because of its religious content, and from soliciting or encouraging religious or anti-religious activity.

However, the board recognizes that a genuine and broad secular program of education is furthered by advancement of pupils' knowledge of our society's cultural and religious heritage. Teachers and administrators may teach about religion, including the Bible, Koran, or other scripture; the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture-as-literature), and the role of religion in history. Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies.

Teachers and administrators may also teach and encourage civic virtues, including but not limited to honesty, good citizenship, courage, respect for the rights and freedoms of others, respect for persons, respect for the property of others, respect and tolerance for other beliefs, sportsmanship, civility and hard work. The fact that most of these values are also held by many religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.

Certificated school staff may teach about religious holidays, and may celebrate the secular aspects of the holiday and objectively teach about their religious aspects. They may not observe the holidays as religious events or promote their observance by students. Religious symbols may be displayed only as a teaching aid or resource and only if they are displayed as part of the cultural and religious heritage of the holidays and are temporary in nature. The singing of songs with religious themes may be permissible where such songs have achieved a cultural significance which would justify their being sung in a public school.

Students have the right to pray individually or in groups and to discuss their religious views with their peers so long as they are not disruptive of their own or others' education. Students shall have the right to meet and to access, advertise and form clubs out of school hours on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to the religious, political, philosophical or other content of their speech at such meetings or clubs. All Student Initiated Clubs (as opposed to officially School Sponsored Clubs or Organizations) shall be subject to the following restrictions:

- (1) the meetings must be voluntary and student initiated;
- (2) there is no sponsorship of the meeting by the school, its agents or employees;
- (3) a certified staff member(s) of the school must be present at religious, philosophical or political meetings, but only in a non-participatory capacity;
- (4) the meetings are not disruptive and do not interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school;

- (5) Non-school persons may not direct, conduct, control or regularly attend activities of Student Initiated Clubs.

No prayers shall be sponsored or offered by the school district either during school or at graduation, nor shall any religious baccalaureate ceremonies be sponsored by the school district.

Any student whose parent or guardian presents to the principal a signed statement that any part of the health, family life education or sex education instruction is in conflict with his conscience or sincerely held moral or religious beliefs shall be excused from that portion of the course where such instruction is being given, without penalties as to credit or graduation.

Students shall similarly be excused from any other instruction which is objectionable to the parent of a student on the grounds of religion. In the event the excusal is from a significant portion of a course, the student may be required to engage in alternative independent study in order to receive full credit.

Legal References:

N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties

N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.6 and 4.7

N.J.S.A. 18A:36-16 Rules regarding religious holidays

U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 1, 14

20 U.S.C.A. 4071 - Equal Access Act

Florey v. Sioux Falls School District, 619 F.2d. 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)

Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, 104 S.Ct. 1355, 79 L.E.D. 2d 604 (1984)

Edwards v. Aquillard, 482 U.S. 578 S.Ct. 2573, 96 L.E.D. 2d 510 (1987)

Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. ____, 112 S.Ct. 2649, 120 L.E.D. 2d 467 (1992)

American Civil Liberties Union v. Blackhorse Pike Regional Board of Education, No. 93-2651 (District Court, March 29, 1994)

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