

Sample

Code: IGACA-AR
Adopted:

RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Introduction

The policy of the district reflects a commitment to the principles of religious neutrality and the accommodation of diversity, promoting respect and understanding of different beliefs and customs. To include religious music, symbols, art or writings in school programs, displays, performances, classroom activities and/or celebrations, the teacher must demonstrate an educational purpose consistent with the stated objectives of the curriculum. Therefore, reflective preview by teacher and administrator of the content of such activities is necessary and appropriate. In considering any material, the artistic, social and cultural aspects relevant to the purpose for including the material should be taken into account.

Religion in the Curriculum

Religious institutions and orientations are central to human experience, past and present. An education excluding such a significant aspect of human culture would be incomplete. It is essential that teaching about and not of religion be conducted in a factual, objective and respectful manner.

Therefore, the practice of the district shall be as follows:

1. The district supports the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama and the arts in the curriculum provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively. Care should be taken when considering the seasonal inclusion of literature, music, drama and the arts that the use not lead to the observation or celebration of a particular religious holiday. Religious music should not dominate and any dramatic productions should emphasize the cultural aspects of the holiday. For example, while recognizing the holiday season, none of the school activities in December should have the purpose or effect of promoting or inhibiting religion;
2. Instruction should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs or non-beliefs;
3. The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature and history should be appropriate to its educational value and only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas;
4. Student-initiated expressions in response to questions or assignments which reflect their beliefs or

non-beliefs about religious themes shall be accommodated and should be encouraged. For example, students are free to express religious belief or non-belief in compositions, art forms, music, speech and debate.

Exemption from Course(s)

The practice of the district is to excuse students from state- or district-required programs, learning activities and expectations when those programs, activities or expectations conflict with religious beliefs of parents and students (according to Oregon Administrative Rules). In the case of individual lessons, students may be assigned alternative assignments in a way which is not embarrassing to the student. When a significant portion of a state- or district-required course is objectionable, the student will be granted an exemption from the course and any expectations assigned to that course. In such cases, the student will be expected to enroll in another class and, at the high school level, to earn a credit in lieu of the exempted course. The exemption from a course on religious grounds does not reduce the number of credits required for graduation from the district. Any waiver or exemption from state- or district-required courses must be acknowledged in writing by the parent, and a copy of the request and decision must be filed with the appropriate executive administrator of school improvement and support as well as attached to the transcript.

One written request by the parent on file is all that is required per student during his/her time in a particular school.

Dedications and Commencement

Traditions are a cherished part of the community life and the district expresses an interest in maintaining those traditions which have had a significance to the community. Such ceremonies should recognize the religious pluralism of the community.

Therefore, the practice of the district shall be as follows:

1. A dedication ceremony should recognize the religious pluralism of the community and be appropriate to those who use the facility. An open invitation should be extended to all citizens to participate in the ceremony;
2. Traditions, i.e., invocation and benediction, inherent in commencement ceremonies, should be honored in the spirit of accommodation and good taste;
3. Because the baccalaureate service is traditionally religious in nature, it should be sponsored by agencies separate from the district;
4. School choruses, bands, orchestras and other performing groups may accept occasional invitations to perform at non-school religious functions with the condition that:
 - a. Any member of the group may be excused without penalty of any sort at his/her request; and
 - b. The performance must meet the test of religious neutrality. However, school choruses, bands, orchestras and other performing groups may not sponsor or promote performances at

religious functions or of a religious nature.

Holidays

Studying about religious holidays may be included in elementary, middle and high school curricula as opportunities for teaching about religions if:

1. The purpose is to provide secular instruction about multicultural religious traditions rather than to promote, observe or celebrate particular religions or religious holidays;
2. It is done within the context of the district curriculum.

Religious music*, symbols**, art or writing in school programs, displays, performances, classroom activities and/or celebrations must have an educational purpose consistent with the stated objectives of the curriculum. Where the study of religion is an integral part of the curriculum, whether it is seasonal or not seasonal, symbols appropriate to that study may be displayed for the time their presence is necessary to the study and shall be limited to the area(s) where the study occurs. Religious symbols may be displayed seasonally only as a part of a broad, balanced multicultural study. The overall effect of such a display shall not promote or favor any religious practice, belief or non-belief.

* Religious music includes:

Any music which recognizes the existence of a supreme being or deity. "The Messiah," "O Holy Night," "Silent Night," "The Kaddish," "Kol Nidre" and "Maoz Tzur" are examples of this music. Music is not prohibited solely because it has a reference to God in it.

** A religious symbol includes:

Any object which portrays or recognizes the existence of a supreme being or deity. The cross, star of David, nativity scene, menorah, tablets, chalices, crescent, Buddha and any other symbols which are part of a religious celebration are in this category.

In all school programs and study, care must be taken to avoid the presentation of religious music as a celebration of a particular religion or religious holiday and to ensure that there is no intent to promote or denigrate any particular religion or non-religion.

The district and school calendars shall be prepared with the intent to avoid conflicts with the religious holidays of all faiths. Where conflicts are unavoidable, care should be taken to avoid tests, special projects, introduction of new concepts and other activities which would be difficult or impossible to make up. The students who remain in school should continue to have meaningful learning experiences.

A student's religious beliefs shall be honored by excusing the student at the student's or parent's request from school on the student's religious holidays. Upon successful completion of make-up work, there shall be no penalties attached to these absences. Care must be taken at all levels to respect student's rights to express themselves through the use of religious symbols in reports, projects and other assignments as long

as these symbols are removed upon completion of the activity.

Educators must be sensitive to the diversity of cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs in our society. Special care must be taken to ensure that students do not experience exclusionary feeling and can participate comfortably in school programs, displays, performances, classroom activities and/or celebrations. Classroom parties held at a holiday time must be secular in nature and their overall effect should not promote or favor any religious practice, belief or non-belief.

Reconsideration of the Use of Religious Curriculum

Although care is exercised by the teacher and administrator so that the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama and the arts in the curriculum avoids the observation or celebration of a particular religious holiday, a member of the community or staff may wish to request a reconsideration of an activity, display or performance which is inconsistent with the curriculum. In such an event, the individual shall contact the teacher to informally resolve the issue. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the principal shall:

1. Have the community or staff member complete the form for "Reconsideration of Religious Curriculum";
2. Acknowledge receipt of all written or verbal requests for reconsideration of religious curriculum;
3. Notify all staff members who are directly involved in the request;
4. Forward the "Request for Reconsideration of Religious Curriculum" and other appropriate correspondence to the K-12 administrator for curriculum and staff development;
5. The K-12 administrator for curriculum and staff development will establish a committee to review the request for reconsideration;
6. The curriculum in question shall continue to be used until the formal procedure is complete;
7. Final action on the request shall be taken by the administration no later than five school days after the K-12 administrator for curriculum and staff development receives the completed "Request for Reconsideration of Religious Curriculum";
8. The individual making the request for reconsideration may withdraw the request at any time during the review process.

Request for Reconsideration of Religious Curriculum

Initiated by _____
Name (Please Print) Telephone

Address

Representing _____
Self Group (Name)

Curriculum questioned:

Please respond to the following questions. If more space is needed, use additional paper.

1. To what aspect of the curriculum do you object? Please cite specifics.

2. Please discuss the rationale for your objection and the basis on which the objection rests.

3. What action do you recommend that the school take on this curriculum?

Signature

Date

Please return this form to the principal.

Received by the principal: _____
Signature

School

Date and Time of Day

(continued)

STATEMENT OF COURSE EXEMPTION
(to be attached to student transcript)

Approval has been granted to _____ for an exemption from _____ due to a conflict with family religious beliefs. This exemption was initiated by the attached written request from the student's parent(s), _____.

Principal Signature

Date