BP 6141.2 RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Note: As a condition of receiving federal education funds, school districts must annually certify, in writing, to the Department of Education and Early Development that no district policy prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools. In addition, AS 14.30.016 allows parents to withdraw their child from an activity, class, program, or state standards-based assessment for a religious holiday, as defined by the parent.

Note: Pursuant to AS 14.03.090, partisan, sectarian, or denominational doctrines may not be advocated in a public school during the hours the school is in session. A teacher or school board violating this section may not receive public money

Factual and objective teaching about religion must be distinguished from religious indoctrination, which is forbidden in public schools. The schools may teach about religion from a historical, cultural, sociological or other educational perspective, but must not favor the beliefs and customs of any particular religion or sect over any others in such teaching.

Instructional programs may include references to religion and may use religious literature, art, music or symbols to illustrate the subject matter being taught. Such instruction should be designed to broaden the students' understanding of social and cultural history and their tolerance for the multiple ways of life practiced by the peoples of the world. Instruction about religious holidays shall be carefully tied to these educational objectives.

The School Board recognizes the rights of all students to engage in private religious activity, individually or in groups. This may include reading of religious texts, religious discussions, and prayer. It is the policy of the School Board not to prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in the schools, consistent with guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The School Board recognizes the rights of parents/guardians to have their children observe religious holidays practiced by the family. Parents may excuse their children from an activity, class, program, school day, or standards-based assessment or test required by the State of Alaska in order to observe a religious holiday.

(cf. 6020 – *Parent Involvement)*

Staff members shall be sensitive to their obligation not to interfere with the philosophical/religious development of each student, in whatever tradition the student embraces. Students may voluntarily pray at any time before, during, or after the school day when not engaged in instruction or other school activities, subject to the same rules of order that apply to other student activities.

School-sponsored programs should not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration.

The School Board respects the diversity and rich heritage of our community members. Classroom decorations and costumes during holidays may express seasonal themes which are not religious in nature.

(cf. 5113 - *Absences and Excuses)*

(cf. 5145.2 - *Freedom of Speech/Expression)*

(cf. 6115 - *Ceremonies and Observances)*

(cf. 6144 - *Controversial Issues)*

Legal Reference:

ALASKA STATUTES

14.03.090 Sectarian or denominational doctrines prohibited

14.30.016 A parent's right to direct the education of the parent's child

UNITED STATES CODE

Elementary and Secondary Education Act,

20 U.S.C. § 7904, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (P.L. 114-95 December 10, 2015)

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Craig City School District