

( ) Required  
(X) Local  
(X) Notice

### **TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES**

The Board of Education recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observations in promoting patriotism and good citizenship among the students. Therefore, activities in schools commemorating national holidays are encouraged.

The Board of Education remains impartial with regard to religion and seeks neither to advance nor inhibit religion. Students, faculty, and administration are reminded of the pluralism of religious beliefs and are urged to be conscious of and respect the sensitivities of others.

Notwithstanding, the Board recognizes that activities related to the celebration of religious holidays presents an excellent opportunity to teach about religion and foster respect and understanding among students. In addition, educational goals motivated by secular purposes cannot always filter out religious aspects, and sometimes require the presentation of material with religious themes. Therefore, activities related to the observance of religious holidays will be permitted to the extent that they are conducted in an unbiased and objective manner and focus on the origins of the holiday, its history, and the generally agreed upon meaning of the holiday observance.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort should be made to ensure that the activity is not devotional and students of all faiths can join without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs. Therefore:

- a. school and class plays shall not be overtly religious;
- b. religious music shall not entirely dominate the selection of music; and
- c. program notes and illustrations shall not be religious or sectarian.

The display of religious objects or symbols is also prohibited except to the extent that they are used as a teaching aid resource to provide examples of cultural and religious heritage within the context of a short-term study in the curriculum such as world religions, art history. Moreover, students are not permitted to distribute items or materials of a religious or sectarian nature at school sponsored events or events that could be perceived as school sponsored.

Students shall be given the option to be excused from participating in those parts of a program or curriculum involving a religious theme which conflict6s with their own religious beliefs.

Prior to presenting controversial materials to their students all teachers shall:

1. review carefully any and all material to be distributed to students with the understanding that they will be responsible and accountable for all materials distributed; and
2. notify the Principal in advance of the dissemination of any material likely to be considered controversial by staff, class or community.

The Principal will review the materials pursuant to the guidelines above and will alert the Superintendent.

Ref: *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 260 (1988) (students have First Amendment rights)  
*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988) (limitations on students First Amendment rights in an educational setting)  
*Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) (balance discretion of the Board over educational affairs with student's constitutional rights)  
*Appeal of Malverne Union Free School District*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 363 (1990) (teachers First Amendment rights in an educational setting)  
*Appeal of O'Connor*, 29 Educ. Dep't. Rept. 48 (1989) (notification prior to dissemination of controversial materials)

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