

San Lorenzo Unified School District

Board Policy

Recognition of Religious Beliefs, Customs and Holidays

Instruction

BP 6141.2

The Governing Board recognizes that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in society. As appropriate for a particular course, teachers may objectively discuss the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with culture, literature or the arts. The Board expects that such instruction will identify principles common to all religions and foster respect for the diversity of religions and customs in the world.

The District's practices regarding the study of and celebration of holidays and the holding of school parties should further the District curricular goals and objectives and should be integrated into the District's regular educational program. Recognition of holidays and the holding of parties must also be in compliance with District policies and procedures, including policies on multi-cultural education and religion in the schools. These policies provide, in part:

- The District's educational program shall promote the understanding of and respect and appreciation for the cultural diversity of our society. The educational program shall include consideration of the historical and contemporary contributions made different racial and ethnic groups, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, religious groups, people with disabilities and all protected classes.
- Since the contribution of religions to civilization is one of the crucial keys to understanding human history and development, the study of religious history and traditions should be part of the school curriculum and can play a vital role in enhancing an understanding among people of different religious backgrounds and beliefs. Such studies should give neither preferential nor derogatory treatment to any single religion or to religion in general, and should not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes. Furthermore, no religious belief or nonbelief should be promoted by the District or its employees and none shall be disparaged.
- The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the program of education provided such instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner. The selection of holidays to be studied shall take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities shall be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences, and shall be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time.

Staff shall not endorse, encourage or solicit religious or anti-religious expression or activities among students during class time. As part of their official duties, staff shall not lead students in prayer or other religious activities. However, staff shall not prohibit or discourage any student from praying or otherwise expressing his/her religious belief as long as this does not disrupt the classroom.

Students may express their beliefs about religion in their homework, artwork and other class work if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards.

While teaching about religious holidays is a permissible part of the educational program, celebrating specific religious holidays is not allowed in the public schools. School-sponsored programs shall not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration. School and classroom decorations may express seasonal themes that are not religious in nature.

Music, art, literature or drama programs having religious themes are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in an objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage. The use of religious symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided that such symbols are displayed as an example of cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

38130-38138 Civic Center Act

46014 Absences for religious purposes

51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study

51938 Right of parent/guardian to excuse from sexual health instruction

UNITED STATES CODE, TITLE 20

4071-4074 Equal Access Act

6061 School prayer

7904 School prayer

COURT DECISIONS

Lassonde v. Pleasanton Unified School District, (2003, 9th Cir.) 320 F.3d 979

Cole v. Oroville Union High School District, (2000, 9th Cir.) 228 F.3d 1092

Lemon v. Kurtzman, (1971) 403 U.S. 602

Management Resources:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PUBLICATIONS

Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, February 2003

WEB SITES

California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov>

U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>

CSBA: <http://www.csba.org>

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San Lorenzo Unified School District

Administrative Regulation

Recognition of Religious Beliefs, Customs and Holidays

Instruction

AR 6141.2

Staff shall make every effort to schedule one-time events, such as examinations, school-sponsored trips, special laboratories, picture-taking days and class parties, to minimize conflicts with major religious holidays of all faiths.

Programs and Exhibits

When school programs and exhibits are in any way related to instruction about religion or religious holidays, the following guidelines shall be observed:

1. The principal or designee shall ensure that school-sponsored programs are presented in an objective manner, consistent with Board policy.
2. The principal or designee shall be kept informed of the program's development.
3. Program or exhibit planners shall take into consideration the diverse religious faiths represented in the community, student body and staff.

Holidays

1. Holidays which are recognized and celebrated by various religious groups may be studied in the District. There shall be no attempt to promote or disparage any religion. The holidays of just a single religion shall not be chosen for study. If studied, holidays of various religions shall be included.
2. Holidays which have primarily a secular basis may be recognized and celebrated as well as studied. This includes, for example: New Year's, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day and Veterans Day.
3. Holidays which have both a secular and religious basis may be studied and celebrated provided the celebration is secular and nonreligious.
4. Holiday symbols which are primarily secular may be displayed and used in instructional materials. This includes, for example: pumpkins, hearts, bunnies and eggs, bells, wreaths, and reindeers. However, appropriate discretion should be used, so that such holiday symbols and/or colors do not dominate in the school/office environment and interfere with the learning environment. Schools/offices should consider also displaying seasonal items, such as sleds, snow figures, snowflakes, mittens, umbrellas, flowers, etc.
5. Holiday symbols which are primarily religious, such as an angel, a cross, a nativity scene, a menorah, a Star of David, or a Crescent may be shown as part of a study of a particular religion on a temporary basis, but shall not be displayed in the school/office buildings or used in holiday celebrations.
6. Classrooms shall not have Holiday trees, either live or artificial, on display due to health and safety factors; however, they may be displayed in common areas such as school offices and libraries

7. The school/office shall not have single holiday caroling or conduct holiday “sing-alongs” that only revolve around one holiday. For example, The District will not have “Christmas” music programs, but may have winter programs which have a variety of music.
 - a. Music with a religious basis, such as Christmas carols, may be studied and performed, provided they are presented in a prudent manner and as part of the cultural heritage of the holiday. Carols shall be interspersed with other music.
8. Service projects, such as distributing items to needy families, may be conducted at holiday times, but such projects should be considered throughout the school year. Consideration should always be given to whether such activities interfere with learning during the holiday season.
9. Consideration should be given to all staff and students when planning celebrations so that staff and students do not feel excluded or uncomfortable. For example, staff and students who express reservations or concerns regarding celebrations due to religious or cultural beliefs should be provided with alternate activities and not required to participate in any school, office, or classroom celebrations.

Parties

1. There shall be an attempt to limit school-wide parties during the school day in a site during a school year, so as to preserve the maximum amount of time for instruction. Each site shall determine the occasions on which parties will be held. It is suggested that the building principal consult with the building staff, families and students in determining which parties will be held.
2. Parties may not be religious celebrations or devotional in character.
3. Themes for parties which further educational objectives in the curriculum are specifically encouraged.
4. Invitations to guests to school parties must be approved in advance by the principal.
5. Consideration should be given to all students when planning parties so that students do not feel excluded or uncomfortable. The diverse ethnic, economic, racial and religious character of the student body should be considered. For example, if cards are to be shared at a Valentine’s party, provisions should be made so that all students have cards to share and so that all students are included in an exchange.

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