

Greater Albany SD 8J Board Policy

Code: **IGACA-AR**
Revised/Reviewed: 3/22/04; 8/13/07; 8/22/11

Religion in the Public Schools

Religion in the Curriculum

The district seeks to maintain a spirit of inclusiveness and respect for all students and staff. The instruction should be viewed as a vehicle for building understanding and respect rather than a mechanism for discrimination or exclusion.

The district supports the insertion of religious literature, music, drama and the arts in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively.

The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature and history should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs.

As curriculum and instruction include theories, views and precepts, they will be represented as such and not as fact.

Student-initiated expressions to questions or classroom assignments that reflect their beliefs or nonbeliefs about a religious theme shall be accommodated. For example, students are free to express religious belief or nonbelief in compositions, art forms, music, speech and debate.

Classroom activities, parties, plays, musical programs, etc. shall be evaluated for their general educational and cultural value to all students. Music programs may have religious content, but should be balanced to display the cultural celebrations of a variety of heritages.

If a student or parent or guardian¹ objects on religious grounds to reading, studying or discussing any instructional material, the teacher will supply an alternative without prejudice to the student.

Staff members, while on duty, may neither require nor attempt to persuade anyone to go to or remain away from religious services. They may neither force nor urge anyone to engage in or refrain from religious acts or the profession of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs. They may not give preferential treatment to believers or nonbelievers. They may not reward, punish or discriminate against anyone for profession of religious beliefs or the lack thereof.

¹As used in this document, the term parent includes legal guardian or person in a parental relationship. The status and duties of a legal guardian are defined in ORS 125.005(4) and 125.300 - 125.325. The determination of whether an individual is acting in a parental relationship, for purposes of determining residency, depends on the evaluation of those factors listed in ORS 419B.373. The determination for other purposes depends on evaluation of those factors and a power of attorney executed pursuant to ORS 109.056. For special education students, parent also includes a surrogate parent, an adult student to whom rights have transferred and foster parent as defined in OAR 581.015-0005(18).

Observances of Religious Holidays

The several holidays throughout the year that have a religious and secular basis should be observed in the public schools.

The historical and contemporary values and the origin of religious holidays should be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.

Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes are permitted and encouraged as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday.

The use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, Star of David, crèche, symbols of Native American religions or other symbols that are part of a religious holiday are permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided such symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature. Examples of such holidays are Christmas, Easter, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Thanksgiving and Yom Kippur to name a few.

The district's calendar should seek to minimize conflicts with religious holidays of all faiths.

Traditional Observances

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

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

Christmas trees are permitted as they are a cherished part of community life and may have less of a religious significance than a cross, nativity scene or menorah. Principals, however, should be in touch with their community and sensitive to the customs of their community. They should evaluate the teaching opportunity and consider adjacent displays of appropriate artifacts of other cultures.

Because the baccalaureate service is traditionally religious in nature, it should be sponsored by the graduating senior class and the clergy of the community, separate from the district. The service may be held on or in school property, conforming to the current use policy.

A memorial service or like observance should recognize the religious pluralism of the community.

School Employees

Teachers and the district staff will be judged solely on their professional competence and never based upon their religious beliefs, nonbeliefs or association. No person will be barred from employment merely because of membership in a religious group.

District employees shall be permitted to wear religious clothing while performing official duties, except when doing so would hinder the legal obligation of the district to:

1. Maintain religious neutrality in the educational environment; or
2. Refrain from endorsing religion.

In assessing whether the district may restrict or prohibit the wearing of religious clothing, the district should consider (This language is consistent with Administrative Regulation GBCA-AR):

Whether the employee's intent of wearing the religious clothing or by wearing the clothing is likely to be perceived by students, parents or employees to indoctrinate or proselytize students and/or create the impression that the district endorses religion or the employee's particular religious belief.

1. Specific factors to be considered when assessing employee's intent and reasonable perception should include but not be limited to:
 - a. The size and visibility of the religious clothing;
 - b. The inclusion of any writing or symbols on the religious clothing that communicates a direct message;
 - c. Any accompanying verbal statements or declarations of a religious nature that goes beyond a limited explanation of the religious significance of obligation associated with the wearing of the religious clothing;
 - d. The number of employees requesting or wearing the same or similar religious clothing in the school; and
 - e. The reasonableness of this perception should take into account the age, background and sophistication of the student, parent or employee in the school who regularly encounters the employee.
2. Whether the wearing of religious clothing disrupts the educational process, harasses, intimidates, coerces or otherwise interferes with the rights of students, parents or another school employee in the district.