

## Teaching About Religion

The public schools are obligated to maintain neutrality in matters of religion.

Teachers shall be permitted to expose students to information concerning religions and religious beliefs, but teachers shall not advocate, openly or covertly or by subtlety, a particular religion or religious belief.

The teaching of religion is to be distinguished from teaching factually and objectively about religion.

For example, religion is often a factor to be considered in history, art, literature or music.

Teachers may explain the meaning of religious holidays (Hanukkah, Christmas, Passover, St. Patrick's Day, Good Friday, etc.) as viewed by a religion's adherents and others, but may not celebrate such holidays with religious observances or symbols in the classroom.

Instruction in morality, ethics and values is encouraged; but instruction shall not resort to partisan religious sanctions.

Bible reading for historical or literary instructional purposes is permissible. Examples of improper activities, where attendance is mandatory, would be prayers in classes or assemblies, (and distribution) to individual students on school property of New or Old Testaments, Bibles or other religious literature - other than for clearly identified school curriculum purposes.

School books, films, newspapers, bulletins or public address systems shall not be used to promote or encourage nonreligion, partisan religion, partisan religious viewpoints, religious groups or partisan religious activities.

School choruses, bands and orchestras may accept occasional invitations to perform at nonschool religious functions, only on condition that any member of the group may be excused without penalty of any sort at his/her request.

No public school funds, property or other facilities shall be used for the devotional display of religious symbols (such as a Star of David, cross, crucifix, Christmas nativity scene, or a Buddhist statue of sacred monkeys). Specifically, in keeping with the Attorney General's ruling, it is not ". . . permissible to maintain a creche (nativity scene) in Oregon public school rooms while school is in session and children required to attend."

Religious baccalaureate services shall not be required school activity. Student representatives of graduating classes desiring to have a baccalaureate service outside school hours may arrange with clergy for his/her services and for suitable facilities.

Attendance at any such services should be entirely voluntary and optional with class members and school personnel acting as private individuals.

A student's religious beliefs shall be honored by excusing him/her from school on recognized religious holidays at his/her parents' request.

END OF POLICY

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**Legal Reference(s):**

[ORS 332.107](#)

[ORS 336.035](#)

U.S. CONST. amend. I.

OR. CONST., art. I.