



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BULLETIN

TITLE: Holiday Displays and Programs

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ROUTING
All Employees
All Locations

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this Bulletin is to update and clarify procedures for holiday displays and programs at schools, District offices, and worksites.

MAJOR CHANGES: This Bulletin replaces BUL-6204.0, “Holiday Displays and Programs”, dated December 4, 2013, issued by the Office of the Superintendent.

BACKGROUND: This Bulletin provides guidelines regarding holiday displays and programs. Respect for humankind is increased by recognizing and understanding the beliefs, values, and customs of others. School programs designed to improve comprehension and acceptance of differences have educational significance. This bulletin provides information for administrators and personnel who will be preparing holiday displays and planning holiday programs. With regard to religious matters in public school settings, section 51511 of the California Education Code provides, as follows:

“Nothing in this code shall be construed to prevent, or exclude from the public schools, references to religion or references to or the use of religious literature, dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, or other things having a religious significance when such references or uses do not constitute instruction in religious principles or aid to any religious sect, church, creed, or sectarian purpose and when such references or uses are incidental to or illustrative of matters properly included in the course of study.”

GUIDELINES: The following guidelines apply:

- I. Inclusion is the key to an appropriate holiday display or program. Guidelines for holiday displays are applicable to schools, District offices, and worksites. A display that includes a religious holiday symbol as well as other holiday symbols such as Christmas trees or menorahs would not be a violation of federal or state law. A program that includes a religious song among other holiday or seasonal musical selections would similarly not violate law.



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Court recognizes Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and menorahs as relevant to holidays that have a secular, as well as religious significance, and has upheld their decorative usage, as long as they neither advance nor inhibit religion.

A multitude of faiths and beliefs are represented within the District. There is no expectation that students and staff be shielded from content that differs from their faith or belief. Nevertheless, schools, offices and worksites are encouraged to exercise sensitivity and inclusion so that all students and staff feel welcome in their school community or work location.

- II. The demographics of the District emphasize the need to provide inclusion, educate, and share information about the rich cultural traditions and heritage of the many groups that are represented in our communities. Care needs to be exercised in developing the content of these programs to respect diversity and the separation of church and state in a prudent and objective manner, to ensure that sectarian doctrine is avoided.

III. Administrative, Multicultural, and Curricular Implications

- A. Staff members, advisory councils, members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), Local School Leadership Council, and other appropriate advisory personnel should participate in planning and developing holiday programs that reflect respect for the sensibilities of staff and students of all faiths. Programs should be consistent with the policies of the Board of Education and the laws of the State of California.
- B. Holiday programs require careful planning so that no student or staff member will be prevented from participation, nor compelled to participate, because of personal conviction. At all times, students and staff must be provided the privilege of excuse from participation in any holiday program without penalty, bias, or retaliation.
- C. Students benefit from programs that increase awareness of the variety of beliefs in a pluralistic society and that teach mutual understanding, fellowship, and respect for group differences. They also benefit from programs that increase their awareness of how holidays are observed by different groups and nationalities. Emphasis should be placed on cultural learning.
- D. The quality of content and the length of time spent in the preparation and presentation of any program must be educationally justifiable. Programs prepared under the jurisdiction of the school are a part of the curriculum,



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and administrators are expected to assess and supervise the educational value of all programs that are developed.

- E. Sectarian scenes, displays, and tableaux whose purpose is to create a religious tone or sacred atmosphere are not to be included.
- F. Religious exhibits, displays, or symbols such as crosses, crèches, and menorahs may be used when they are a necessary and integral part of the study of subjects in the curriculum, such as art or history. However, such exhibits, displays, and symbols may not be used as decorations unless they are part of a display that includes other holiday symbols, as well.
- G. Principals may wish to notify off-track students and their parents of the dates of any planned activities.
- H. The District Memorandum on the "Calendar of Commemorative Dates and Observances" is issued annually and offers opportunities for a variety of school programs. Some of these include recognition of persons who made significant contributions to American life, events that influenced development as a nation, and activities that highlight cultural and religious heritages.

AUTHORITY: United States Constitution, First and Fourteenth Amendments
California Education Code, section 51511
County of Allegheny v. Greater Pittsburgh ACLU (1989) 492 U.S. 573
Okrand v. City of Los Angeles (1989) 207 Cal App. 3d 566
School Dist. of Abington Township, Pa. v. Schempp, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)
Florey v. Sioux Falls School Dist., 619 F. 2d 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)

RELATED RESOURCES: BUL-4983.0, "Guidelines for Teaching About Religions," dated April 25, 2014, issued by the Office of the Superintendent.

ASSISTANCE: For assistance, please contact your Local District Operations Coordinator. For further information, please call the Office of School Operations at (213) 241-5337.