

**Regulation**

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RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

It is permissible for the schools of the Bordentown Regional School District to teach about religion or the differences in religious sects, as long as the school does not favor religion over non-religion or one religion over the other. The program director/supervisor should make every effort to ensure that holiday concerts present a variety of musical selections that represent various cultural and religious traditions. While some religious music may be performed, it should not dominate the program. Any dramatic productions should emphasize the cultural and not the worshipful aspects of the holiday.

The principal shall approve the musical content of holiday concerts and performances. In determining the appropriateness of the program content the following considerations shall be applied:

- A. Is there a clear educational purpose? Under the First Amendment, learning about religious holidays is an appropriate educational goal – celebrating or observing religious holidays is not.
- B. Will any student or parent be made to feel like an outsider by the concert, lesson or activity? Most parents and students are fine with learning about religious traditions – as long as the school's approach is academic, not devotional. It is never appropriate for public schools to proselytize.
- C. Is our overall curriculum balanced and fair? December shouldn't be the only time sacred music pops up in the curriculum. Students should learn about religious music from various traditions at other times of the year.

Students shall not be forced to participate in any event or portion of an event that offends his or her beliefs.

Music

Musical selections should be chosen on the basis of their particular musical, historical and educational value and be presented in concert with a balanced representation of musical works, whether sacred or secular, with consideration of the ability level and maturity of students involved. Musical pieces should be selected and performed as works of art, not as acts of veneration. No concert should appear to be a celebration of a religious holiday.

Program notes or oral narration may be provided. These notes should establish an objective context for the performance by giving such information as historical data, identification of the particular group for which the number has significance, and technical characteristics worthy of note.

All performances/concerts sponsored by the school and/or conductor as part of the school program, should follow these guidelines:

- A. No more than 40% of the overall selections, whether they are sacred or secular, may be related to an upcoming/past religious holiday;
- B. The director will consider the demographics of the audience and the group involved when making decisions about participating outside performances. The director will be sensitive about accepting outside performances in order to avoid situations that might be inappropriate for students;
- C. Rehearsal time should be balanced between all types of music throughout the school year;
- D. No music class/ensemble should spend the majority of rehearsal time for the semester/trimester on music related to a religious holiday;

RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS (continued)

- E. Students and/or parents are responsible to request alternative assignments when a sacred selection is first introduced if they deem that it would be inappropriate for them to rehearse and perform;
- F. If there is a concern about music selections chosen for practice and/or performance, the concerned individual should follow the public complaint process identified in board policy 1312 Inquiries and Complaints.

Guidelines for Holiday Observances

The discussion and/or recognition of religious holidays in an objective manner is appropriate in a school provided that it is consistent with the instructional program. The following guidelines shall apply to holiday observances:

- A. School programs specifically relating to religious holidays shall not be, nor have the effect of being, a religious celebration. The atmosphere of a religious ceremony or celebration shall be avoided. Any program, which might reasonably be interpreted as religious indoctrination, shall be avoided;
- B. The right of parents or guardians to determine when their children may decline to participate in holiday programs shall not be limited by school authorities. Parents/guardians shall have the right to determine when their children should be absent from school because of religious observances. Absences for religious observances shall be excused absences according to board policy 5113 Attendances, Absences and Excuses. Verification of absences in observance of a religious holiday should be provided in writing to school authorities as soon as possible after the absence. A student shall not be penalized or deprived of makeup opportunities for such absences;
- C. School personnel shall take into account the possible effects of religious holidays on school attendance when planning school calendars. When possible, examinations and important school activities will not be scheduled on such holidays.

NJSBA Review/Update:

Adopted: