

Instruction

Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs

In accordance with the mandate of the Constitution of the United States of America prohibiting the establishment of religion, it is the policy of the Ledyard Board of Education that the Ledyard Public Schools shall, at all times and in all ways, be neutral in the matters of religion.

However, this requirement of neutrality need not preclude nor hinder the public schools in fulfilling their responsibility to educate students to be tolerant and respectful of religious diversity. The District also recognizes that one of its educational responsibilities is to advance the students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religion has played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.

Therefore, the District shall approach religion from an objective, curriculum-related perspective, encouraging all students and staff members to be aware of the diversity of beliefs and respectful of each other's religious and/or non-religious views. In that spirit of respect, students and staff members should be excused from participating in activities that are contrary to their religious beliefs unless there are clear issues of compelling public interest that would prevent such excusal.

As required by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Superintendent shall, by October first of each year, certify in writing, or in any other manner as specified by the State Department of Education, to the state that students enrolled in Ledyard Public Schools are not prevented by policy or rule from participating in constitutionally protected prayer. The Superintendent shall ensure that the staff, parents/guardians and students are made aware of the parameters of acceptable religious speech and actions.

Recognition of Religious Holidays

The objective study of religious holidays provides a natural opportunity to promote an appreciation for and respect of diversity. Learning opportunities should extend beyond Judeo-Christian beliefs, reflecting the diversity of global cultures. The following requirements shall govern the recognition of religious holidays and related events in any programs and activities conducted within the Ledyard Public Schools system under the Board's cognizance:

1. Recognition of religious holidays will not dominate the educational program and must support curricular objectives.
2. All religions must be afforded equal dignity, but none advanced nor disparaged.
3. Decorations that are part of custom and have no direct religious meaning (e.g., Christmas tree, menorah, etc.) may be displayed. Tree decoration should not promote religion nor require student participation.
4. School activities, such as concerts, enrichment programs, and parent-teacher organization sales, should focus on seasonal rather than religious themes.
5. Performances that recognize holidays must be of an artistic nature, not religious. Religious music must not dominate any school program. Program selections should not, by their nature, exclude students from participation.
6. Food service staff shall consider religious dietary restrictions when planning school menus (e.g., non-meat meals, limiting pork to one menu choice, etc.).
7. Parents may exclude their children from programs involving the recognition of religious holidays or if the celebration is in conflict with family beliefs. A written request for exclusion should be sent to the building administrator.

Absence for Religious Observation

Student absences for religious observances shall be excused. Furthermore, such absences shall not prohibit receipt of attendance related awards nor impact student grades or participation in school events.

Religion in the Curriculum

Religious institutions and orientations are central to human experience, past and present. It is essential that the teaching about, not of, religion be conducted in a factual, objective and respectful manner.

The Board supports the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, and the arts in the curriculum, where appropriate, and in school activities provided that it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively, without bias for or against any particular religion.

The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature and history should only be as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas. Such studies should never foster any particular religious tenets nor demean any religious beliefs.

In response to classroom questions or assignments, student-initiated expressions that reflect their personal beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme will be accommodated. The student's work shall be objectively evaluated against academic standards and without consideration of the religious content or point of view.

The use of religious symbols (such as a cross, crescent, Star of David, crèche, symbols of Native American religions, etc.) is permitted as a teaching aid or educational resource provided such symbols are directly related to curricular objectives, are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of a particular event, and are temporary in nature.

Student-Initiated Religious Activities

Students have the same rights to engage in religious activity and discussion as they have to engage in other comparable activity while at school. Generally, this means that students may pray in a non-disruptive manner during the school day when they are not engaged in school activity and instruction, subject to the same rules as apply to other speech.

Responsibilities

The Superintendent shall develop guidelines concerning religion in the schools and, after Board approval of such guidelines/regulations, distribute them to the schools.

The building administrators are responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy and related regulations.

Pertinent information regarding this policy and related regulations shall be included in student, parent and staff handbooks.

Related Policies:

0521.2 – Commitment to Religious Neutrality

5113 – Attendance and Excuses

5145.13 – Student Surveys

5145.2 – Freedom of Speech/Expression

6112 – School Day

6142.2 – Multiculturalism

6144 – Controversial Issues

6144.1 – Exemption from Instruction

6145 – Extra-Class Activities – Limited Open Forum

6145.3 – Student Publications

Legal References:

Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-16a – Silent meditation.

U.S. Department of Education guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer
in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools

Title 20, United States Code, Section 7904 – School Prayer. (as modified by
the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*)

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LEDYARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ledyard, Connecticut