

Harrisburg School District	NEPN Code: IGAC
Policy Manual	

Religion & Holidays in Harrisburg Public Schools

The principle that public schools must be religiously neutral is confirmed by a long line of Supreme Court rulings. The Court has defined religiously neutral as refraining from promoting any and all religions, expressing opposition or hostility towards religion and showing preference for one religion or another.

Curriculum and Instruction

Schools are allowed to teach about, but may not celebrate, religious holidays. Schools may recognize holidays for the purpose of providing secular instruction about religious traditions, but not if the goal is to observe or promote a particular religion. If religious holidays or traditions are taught, multiple, diverse religions and cultures must be presented at appropriate times. Study about religion has the potential to help students become more tolerant of people who hold differing beliefs.

Religious music may be included in school events, programs and concerts, provided it is part of a secular program of education. These events, programs and concerts must be primarily secular, objective and educational and may not focus on any one religion or religious holiday. Care must be taken to avoid presentation of religious music as a celebration of a particular religion or non-religion.

If a parent feels a performance or any academic discussion is focused too much on religion, the parent can request that their child be excused.

Religious symbols and displays common to religious holidays should be constructed only as a teaching activity or aid. Displays should be posted only while teaching about that holiday. Students may choose to create pieces with religious symbols, but they cannot be required to do so in classes.

The school calendar may include conflicts with the community's diverse celebrations and holidays. Where conflicts occur, school staff will be sensitive and make accommodations.

In discussions or performances, parents can request that their child be excused from an activity.

Questions to ask before planning a religious activity in a public school:

Is this activity designed in any way to either promote or inhibit religion?

How does this activity meet course content standards and the academic mission of the school?

Will any student or parent be made to feel like an outsider?

Are we prepared to teach about the cultural/historical meaning of this holiday?

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Dedications and Commencements

A dedication or commencement ceremony shall not contain prayers authorized, approved, or sponsored by the district or any of its representatives.

Because a baccalaureate service is traditionally religious in nature, it shall not be sponsored by the district.

Teacher/Staff Participation

School personnel shall not organize, provide leadership, or participate in religious functions, clubs, or organizations during contracted duty hours.

Adopted: May 26, 2015

Revised: