

## **SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY OBSERVANCES**

### Instructional Practices

1. A good education acknowledges the importance of studying about religion. This study would include such learning activities as an analysis of the role of religion in culture and an appreciation of its importance in order to reach a balanced understanding of civilization and society.
2. The treatment of religion in the schools will meet the Supreme Court's constitutional boundaries set forth in the three-part test of Lemon v. Kurtzman: (1) the activity must have a secular purpose, (2) the principal or primary effect of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion, (3) the activity avoids excessive governmental entanglement with religion.
3. Teachers will be sensitive and knowledgeable about the diversity of religious beliefs of the students in their classes. Instructional practices will balance religious beliefs so that all students will feel included; no student will be required to participate in class activities associated with religion if unwilling, or if a parent expresses unwillingness.
4. Community resources and personnel should be used whenever possible by the schools when activities related to religious holidays are planned and implemented.
5. The school system calendar will indicate religious holidays affecting a significant proportion of our population. The school system will indicate holidays that will have an impact upon student participation in school activities.
6. Students will be accommodated if they request of the teacher that they be excused from participating in activities involving religion and/or if they are unable to participate in regular activities due to religious observances. Written parent permission should accompany such student requests.
7. The school will use the standard grievance procedure to resolve differences resulting from the implementation of these guidelines (e.g., appeal to teacher, to principal, superintendent, to the school committee).

### Homework and Tests

8. As stated in the School Committee policy, we recognize that our school community is comprised of individuals with diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds. It is our intent to respect our differences and maintain a liberal view of others. Consistent with this, the school system accommodates individual differences in religious observance. Thus, if a student is affected by a religious holiday that is not observed with a school wide closing, that student will be allowed to have additional, reasonable time to complete assignments and assessments that conflict with their holiday observance even in the event that the student attends classes on that day.

### Curriculum Content

9. As part of a study about the role religion plays in history, culture and the arts, teachers may use religious symbols, art, and music as well as literature drawn from a religious tradition.

### Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities

10. School sports, tryouts and extra-curricular activities should be scheduled so that students will be accommodated if unable to participate due to their observance of a religious holiday.

### Activities, Displays and Exhibits

11. Holiday displays and exhibits in classrooms and schools will be designed to help students appreciate the variety and value of religious traditions in the world. These displays shall not be solely focused on one or two specific holidays. Activities must have an instructional purpose. The principal effect of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.

### Programs and Observances Related to a Religious Holiday

12. Programs (assemblies, plays or other activities) conducted during any religious holidays should be evaluated as to their purpose and effect. Their presentation, content, theme or timing must be secular/educational.

### The Use of Religious Music

13. Music programs should be planned in accordance with the music curriculum objectives. (See also 2, 3, and 6 above.) Music instruction and performance will be designed to help students appreciate the variety and value of cultural and religious traditions in the world.

*Approved 10/7/94 and 10/13/94 by the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Procedure #8 revised to reflect current practice on 6/25/07.*