



IMDC-R - TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION/RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The Constitutions of the United States and Colorado require that no activity of Poudre School District shall be permitted which has the purpose or effect of advancing or inhibiting either religious belief or non-belief, nor shall any activity discriminate between systems of religious belief or forms of worship.

The public schools shall neither endorse nor interfere with religions or religious beliefs. In this regard, the schools shall be guided by a policy of accommodation. The study of religions, religious art, and the activities and effects of religious institutions in a secular, academic context is entirely appropriate. To attempt to remove all such references from the curriculum would result in an incomplete and inaccurate educational program. Poudre School District endorses the study of religion in an objective, respectful, and cross-cultural manner and the study of the American tradition of religious liberty as an integral part of the educational program.

NEUTRALITY

No religious belief or non-belief shall be promoted by Poudre School District or its employees, and none will be disparaged. Instead, the district encourages all students and staff members to appreciate and respect each other's religious views. The district will utilize its opportunity to foster understanding and mutual respect among students and parents, whether it involves race, culture, economic background, or religious beliefs. In that spirit of understanding and respect, students and staff members will be excused from participating in activities which are contrary to their religious beliefs unless there are clear issues overriding concern that would prevent it. In appropriate situations, alternative activities for such persons may be provided.

TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS

An education excluding all references to religions or religious themes would be incomplete. It is essential that the teaching about and not of religion be conducted in an open, objective, and respectful manner and be timed to fit the educational objectives.

1. Poudre School District supports the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, and the arts in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively.

2. Religious themes in the arts, literature, and history may be included to enhance student understanding that religion and diversity of beliefs are basic components of our cultural heritage. Such studies should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs.
3. School programs, performances, and celebrations shall serve an educational purpose. The inclusion of religious music, symbols, art, or writings may be permitted if the religious content has an independent education purpose which contributes to the stated objectives of the approved curriculum. Intent, effect, and timing should be considered when planning school performances and activities.

STUDENT EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

1. Students are free to express religious beliefs or non-beliefs including in discussions, compositions, art forms, music, speech, and debate.
2. No form of prayer, worship, or expression of religious belief or non-belief shall be prescribed or sanctioned in fact or in appearance by the schools. This shall not, however, be construed to restrict students from engaging in spontaneous discussion about religion, personal prayer, or personal meditation which is not disruptive of the educational process and does not infringe upon the privacy rights of others.
3. A great diversity exists in Poudre School District. Therefore, reasonable efforts shall be made to be sensitive to the religious observances of students so that the required school work, including tests, can be made up. Students are responsible for notifying school officials in advance and arranging for make-up work. Students should be excused only to the extent that their ability to complete the educational program is not jeopardized.

PROCESS FOR DECISIONMAKING

1. The Principles for Decisionmaking

The two primary principles guiding professional judgment on issues relating to Board Policy IMDC, Religious Observances and Displays/Teaching About Religion, are:

- a. The Application of the Three-Part Test

(Identified through the United States Supreme Court for use in deciding issues related to the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.) To determine the constitutionality of an activity, all three of the following questions must be answered in the affirmative:

- (1) Purpose: Is the purpose of the activity educational?
- (2) Effect: Is the effect of the activity one that does not promote religion?
- (3) Excessive Entanglement: Does the activity not require or involve excessive relationships between the schools and religious organizations?

b. The Test of Consistency with the Intent of the Policy

Decision makers are charged with the responsibility for exercising professional judgment in determining consistency between the activity in question and the intent to demonstrate a respect for the dignity of individuals and their beliefs.

2. Responsibility for Decisionmaking

Employees are charged with ensuring that activities for which they are responsible are consistent with this policy. When specific religious content is to be included in a lesson or activity, the employee must seek the counsel of his or her immediate supervisor. In the case of programs, performances, celebrations, classroom activities, and/or visual displays, or in the case of school assemblies, sponsoring religious groups, and use of facilities for special programs, the person primarily responsible for the event must seek review by the principal prior to any event which includes religious content.

The appropriate supervisor is responsible for determining that activities have been reviewed as appropriate, that determination has been made that the activities meet the tests outlined above, and that they meet the intent of the policy to respect the dignity of individuals and their beliefs.

TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS

1. Standard Expected by Poudre School District

The inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, and the arts and the inclusion of religious themes in social studies and other courses as significant elements in achieving course objectives shall be in compliance with these regulations.

2. Definition

For the purpose of this regulation, "religious themes" are those concepts which are identified with any religious traditions or tenet.

3. Procedure

- a. To be included, material or activities must meet the two criteria outlined in the introduction:
 - (1) The answers to the three-part test must be positive; and
 - (2) The decision maker must determine that the activity or content is consistent with the intent of the policy and the objectives of the curriculum.
- b. It is the teacher's responsibility to monitor the appearances of materials presented. When materials or activities considered appear questionable, the teacher must request review by the principal.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND DISPLAYS

1. Standard Expected by Poudre School District

To include religious music, symbols, art, or writings in school programs, displays, performances, classroom activities, and/or celebrations, the teacher must demonstrate an independent educational purpose consistent with the stated objectives of the approved curriculum. The district's obligation under the Constitutions of the United States and Colorado provide a compelling interest in assuring that this policy is compiled within all school programs, etc. Therefore, prior review and regulations of the content of such programs is necessary and appropriate.

In considering any material under this regulation, all artistic, social, and cultural aspects relevant to the purpose for including the materials should be taken into account.

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this regulation, "school programs" means school-sponsored and directed student performances or presentations made to or for other classes, schools, parents, or the public. "Religious content" means music, objectives, symbols, art, readings, or writings that are identified with any religious tradition or which refer to any matter or religious concern.

3. Suggested Procedures

a. Prior Review of Proposed Programs

One of the following steps must be taken by a teacher to obtain approval for programs, displays, classroom activities, performances, or celebrations involving religious content.

- (1) The teacher(s) responsible may confer with the building principal to place such programs in an appropriate educational context and to establish cooperative communication for the selection, planning, and presentation of these programs or activities; or
- (2) Prior to the presentation of any school program, display, performance, classroom activity, and/or celebration involving religious content, and prior to any practice to prepare for such a presentation, the teacher(s) responsible for such programs, etc., may submit to the building principal a written instructional plan for the activity.

The plan may include, but not be limited to:

- The curricular objectives to be served
- The specific religious content
- The educational purposes for such religious content
- A description of the entire context of the program within which the religious content will be presented

When circumstances create the need for changes in the proposed activity, the teacher(s) responsible will submit a written amended plan to the principal.

b. The steps below will be followed in giving a response:

- (1) The principal will apply the three-part test to determine whether the proposed activity is acceptable within the context of the U.S. Constitution and the requirements of the district policy.

- (2) Special attention in determining the effect of the activity shall be given to the age and maturity of the participants and the audience. Additionally, attention should be given to other factors, such as the proximity of the activity to a religious holiday, the diversity of the content of the entire activity, the overall impression created by the combination of all the elements in the program, and the use of appropriate disclaimers.
- (3) The principal will exercise his or her best professional judgment in making an informed decision as to compliance with district policy and in deciding whether the proposed activity is consistent with the intent of the policy.
- (4) Within five (5) school days of receipt of the instructional plan, the principal will respond to the teacher in writing indicating one of the following:
 - Approval, or
 - Denial, identifying areas of noncompliance with policy requiring deletion or alteration

APPEAL PROCESS

The steps to be followed in the appeal process are:

1. First Level Appeal--Informal Discussion
 - a. The party wishing to appeal the decision will first meet informally with the immediate supervisor.
 - b. The goal of the meeting is to resolve the matter informally. The decision will be made within two school days from the informal meeting.
 - c. The immediate supervisor will notify the assistant superintendent of school services of the initial decision.
2. Second Level Appeal
 - a. The party wishing to appeal the decision must submit a written request for a review to the director of curriculum and instruction, or designee. The director of curriculum and instruction, or designee, shall review the material submitted. The decision will be made within five (5) school days from the meeting.

- b. Both parties in the appeal may attend and will be requested to present their positions verbally or in writing.

3. Third Level Appeal

- a. Either party in the second level review may appeal the committee's decision to the assistant superintendent of school services, or designee.
- b. A written request for an appeal must be filed within five (5) school days after the date of the decision. The written request must set forth all reasons for disagreement with the decision rendered and must be accompanied by all previously submitted documents and decisions.
- c. The assistant superintendent of school services, or designee, shall review the material submitted.
- d. A written decision will be provided within five (5) school days after receipt of the appeal. The assistant superintendent of school services, or designee, will make the final decision and communicate that decision to the parties.

During the time required for the appeal process, the portion of the activity considered questionable shall not be practiced or performed.

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CROSS REFS:

IMB, Teaching About Controversial Issues

IMBB, Exemptions from Required Instruction

IHAL, Teaching About Religion