

2270 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

The Hanover Township School District is committed to fostering mutual understanding and respect for the rights of all individuals regarding their beliefs, values and customs. We recognize that we serve a diverse community with varying cultural, ethnic and religious orientations.

We are cognizant of the role of culture, including religion, in the development of our society and believe that objectively teaching about religion and its role in the social and historical development of civilization does not violate the religious neutrality of the public schools.

Religious orientations and institutions have had a profound impact on human experience, past and present. An education excluding such a significant aspect would be incomplete. It is essential that the teaching about, and not of, religion be conducted in a factually objective and respectful manner. Music, art, literature, dance and drama representing religious customs and traditions will broaden our pupils' awareness of the many elements that comprise our diverse American culture.

Pupils are free to express religious belief or non-belief in compositions, works of art, music, speech and debate. Such expression will neither be encouraged nor discouraged; it will be handled in a courteous and respectful manner; and pupils who do not feel comfortable participating in an activity are under no obligation to do so and will not be penalized.

In any reference to religion in the schools, the district is guided by the following concepts when determining the appropriateness of activities:

1. The activity should have a secular purpose;
 2. The activity should neither advance nor inhibit religion; and
 3. The activity should have relevance to the curriculum.
- A. Treatment of Religion in the Curriculum

The policy of the Hanover Township School District will be to:

1. Support the inclusion of religious literature, music, drama, dance and visual arts in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience, achieves specific goals in the various fields of study, is presented objectively and neither inhibits nor advances any religious point of view.
 2. Accommodate student-initiated expression in response to questions or assignments which reflect their beliefs or non-beliefs about religious themes in an appropriate manner which takes into account the age and maturity of the students, and tries to create a balance between the individual's right to free exercise and the law against the school's establishment of religion.
 3. Respect the privacy of students by not soliciting information or explanations about their personal religious affiliations, beliefs or practices.
 4. Permit the use of religious symbols to teach about historical or cultural context within the framework of the curriculum, provided that the display is temporary in nature.
- B. Treatment of Religious Holidays in Classrooms, School Buildings, Programs or Concerts

The policy of the Hanover Township School District will be as follows:

1. Religious holidays may be recognized in the schools, in the form of the secular nature of that holiday. Opportunities to learn about cultural and religious traditions should be provided within the framework of the curriculum. Information about religious and cultural holidays and traditions, focusing on how and when they are celebrated, their origins and histories should be part of this instruction.
2. In planning school activities related to the teaching about religious holidays or themes, special effort must be made to ensure the activity is not devotional.

3. When planning lessons, performances, programs and projects containing references to religious holidays or themes, every effort should be made to include a variety of selections throughout the year so as to represent as much diversity as possible.
4. Fine and performing arts programs, projects and performances should include information (oral and/or written) which addresses the cultural and religious heritage of the content. The purpose is to provide opportunities to learn about, to understand and to develop respect of worldwide beliefs and customs of cultures and religions.
5. Performances, programs and projects in the fine and performing arts to be included in holiday programs are to be reviewed and approved by the building principal, in collaboration with the appropriate staff and supervisor. In a case where a teacher does not agree with the Principal's or supervisor's decision, an appeal may be made to the Superintendent and then to the board.

C. Prayer in schools

Prayer and other religious observances may be permitted in the facilities of the Hanover Township School District only in accordance with applicable law, regulation and policy governing the public use of those facilities.

U.S. Consti. Amend. 1
U.S. Department of Education - Guidance on
Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public
Elementary and Secondary Schools - February 7, 2003
N.J. Consti. (1947) Art. 1, para. 4
N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.6 et seq.; 18A:36-16

Adopted: 23 September 2008