

FOX CHAPEL AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

SECTION: PROGRAMS

TITLE: RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

ADOPTED: May 10, 2010

REVISED:

131. RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS	
1. Authority	Religious freedom is one of the building blocks of our American society, and, as such, is protected from government interference or encroachment by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court has reaffirmed and given definition to this constitutional guarantee in relation to the Nation's public schools; our public schools must be religiously neutral.
2. Definition	The Supreme Court has defined religiously neutral as refraining from promotion of any and all religions, expressions of opposition or hostility to religion, and showing preference for one religion over another.
3. Guidelines	<p>On June 25, 1988, leaders representing many segments of American life signed the Williamsburg Charter, a national celebration and reaffirmation of the Religious Liberty clauses of the First Amendment. The Williamsburg Charter, according to Thomas A. Shannon of the National School Boards Association, “stands for the idea that, in our diverse society, our diversity can be our strength. If we learn to manage our most profound division – and there are no deeper differences than sincerely-held religious differences – with abiding respect, civilized courtesy and a commitment to guard our mutual right to disagree on matters theocratic, we shall forge the strongest anvil possible on which to shape our free society in a way that we all want for us today and for our children tomorrow.” As an outgrowth of the Williamsburg Charter, a coalition of fourteen (14) national educational and religious groups met to develop appropriate curriculum, which contains guidelines for teaching about religion in public schools. It was felt that a clear distinction must be made between teaching religion and teaching about religion. To help clarify this distinction for public schools:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school's approach to religion shall be academic, not devotional. 2. The school may strive for student awareness of religions, but should avoid pressing the student to accept any one (1) religion, all religions or no religion.

3. The school may sponsor study about religion, but may not sponsor the practice of religion.
4. The school may expose students to a diversity of religions or views, but may not impose any particular view.
5. The school may educate about all religions, but may not promote or denigrate any faith.
6. The school may inform the student about various beliefs, but should not seek to conform him/her to any particular belief.

The Fox Chapel Area School District embraces these principles in its curricular and extracurricular activities. The district also recognizes that the schools are a reflection of the wider community, which is becoming increasingly more diverse. Sensitivity to the change taking place within the community is important to the district.

Traditions are also a cherished part of community life and the district has an interest in maintaining traditions which have significance to the community in addition to fostering the development of new traditions. A variety of sources were consulted in the development of appropriate guidelines for the district. In addition to the Citizens Advisory Committee Report on Religion in the Schools, the following sources were consulted: Pamphlets on “Religious Holidays in the Public Schools” and “Religion in the Public School Curriculum” published by a coalition of fourteen (14) religious and educational groups; “A Teacher’s Guide to Study About Religion in Public Schools” by Charles C. Haynes; Living With Our Deepest Differences, Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society, published by First Liberty Institute; Religion in the Public Schools, published by American Association of School Administrators; and policy statements from other school districts.

Recognition Of Religious Beliefs And Customs

The district shall promote understanding and mutual respect among diverse students, staff and parents/guardians, whether the diversity involves race, color, nationality, ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, culture, economic background or religious beliefs. In that spirit of understanding, students and staff members shall be excused from participation in practices that are contrary to their religious beliefs unless there are clear issues of overriding concern that would prevent such excuse. No religious belief or disbelief should be promoted by the district or its employees and none should be disparaged. Instead, the district encourages all students and staff members

to understand and respect each other's religious views. One (1) of the district's educational goals is to advance students' knowledge and appreciation of diversity including the role that our religious heritage has played in the social, cultural and historical development of civilization.

Teaching About Religion And Religious Freedoms

Factual and objective teaching about religion is to be distinguished from religious indoctrination that is forbidden in all public schools. This teaching should be based on educational goals and afforded an amount of time proportional to these goals.

1. Intercultural programs that focus on the role played by religion in history or the development of society are generally acceptable and desirable in a multiethnic society.
2. Programs that educate students about the principle of religious liberty as one (1) of the central elements of freedom and democracy in America should be encouraged.

Observance, Acknowledgement And Celebration Of Holidays

Holidays may be acknowledged and observed in the schools, but not celebrated. It is important that the following terms are understood in the context of the school guidelines on religion:

1. **Acknowledgement** means to generally recognize the existence of the holiday.
2. **Observance** is identified as an act of respectful attention to the holiday as a custom.
3. **Celebration** is defined as engaging in prayer, worship, glorification or ritual related to a holiday.

Plans should be made to acknowledge/observe the following holidays through the curriculum or curriculum-related activities. A display of the holiday symbols shall be prepared for those asterisked with one (1) display in each school for those grouped as noted:

Ash Wednesday

Memorial Day

Easter
 Good Friday
 Halloween
 Hanukkah
 Independence Day
 Kwanzaa
 Labor Day
 Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday

Rosh Hashanah
 Simchat Torah
 St. Patrick's Day
 Thanksgiving Day
 Valentine's Day
 Veterans' Day
 Yom Kippur

Holiday Symbols

The use of symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, crèche, angels, decorated artificial Christmas tree, Star of David, The Buddha, symbols of Native American religions, and other symbols that are a part of a religious holiday are permitted as a teaching aid or resource. One (1) of each of the symbols shall be displayed temporarily in a prominent location of each building for instructional purposes as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and in observance of it. The symbols may be displayed five (5) school days before the closing of school for a holiday or five (5) days before the holiday itself. All displays must be of a similar scale and placed in the same location of the building. The intent is to not create the impression among students that one holiday has greater importance than another based upon the size and location of the display. The building principal shall empower a committee representing staff, parents/guardians, residents and students to develop the displays for those cultural or religious holidays designated within the policy for display. The committee may be a standing committee for all displays or a new committee may be convened for each different display. The principal has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the policy and, therefore, must approve the plans of the committee. A large title, "Living With Our Deepest Differences" must be posted at the site of the display. The following statement must appear as part of the display: "The purpose of this display is to assist students in developing an appreciation of our modern pluralistic society and of the principles of religious liberty for peoples of all faiths or none. Teaching the story of religious liberty in America includes discussion of religious beliefs and practices. This display references the (EX: Christian holiday of Christmas, Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Indian holiday of Diwali, etc.)."

The following additional secular symbols may be displayed in classrooms and/or hallways ten (10) school days before the closing of school for Hanukkah or Christmas, provided the displays are prudent: dreidels, bells, stars, holly, wreathes, lights (in a nonreligious context), reindeer, Santa Claus, and Mrs. Claus. Doors may be decorated with any of these symbols or others of a nonreligious nature.

Other traditional holidays for which symbols may be displayed include Halloween, Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day and Easter. Witches, black cats, ghosts, jack-o-lanterns, pilgrims, shamrocks, leprechauns, hearts, eggs and rabbits may be displayed in hallways and classrooms ten (10) school days before the holiday. Classroom bulletin board displays designated to accompany an instructional unit taught as part of the established curriculum other than the traditional/secular aspects of holidays are not limited to any specific period of time. A national display reflecting the civic holidays (Independence Day, Labor Day, Memorial Day) should be combined into one (1) display in each building during the month of May.

Music, Art, Literature And Drama

Music, art, literature, and drama having religious content are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the particular holiday. If a program of music education for young people is to be stimulating, meaningful and successful, it must include a broad variety of music of significant quality. The teacher is permitted to offer sacred and secular music in the classroom and in programs for public concerts representing diverse cultures; however, the selection of music must be based on its musical merit and on its ability to develop musical understanding, growth and appreciation in young people. A good piece of music should not be excluded because of its ethnic or religious origin. The total effect of a music program or concert, however, should be nonreligious. In presenting religious music, the teacher will explain musical ideas remembering the primary objective for students is to learn about music. Christmas carols and Hanukkah selections are appropriate in their cultural context, but should not dominate a music program. To reflect sensitivity toward students, particularly in the elementary and middle school grades, the presentation of Christmas carols and Hanukkah selections may be performed by smaller groups of students who represent their own culture. Students who choose not to participate in the performance of religious music may do so without penalty. Secular seasonal music may be included as sing-along selections for the audience.

In recognition of holiday traditions, music and other programs which may predominately be of a religious nature and represent one (1) particular culture may be presented at times other than regular school hours and not as part of a regular school concert or musical program. Such programs may be organized with the assistance of the PTO/PTA groups or other community groups who have an interest in planning the programs. Attendance at such programs will be voluntary for parents/guardians, students and staff. Art classes may be involved in projects which

depict religions of others when the project is a part of an educational/cultural experience. Otherwise, the depiction of a specific religious viewpoint as a full class activity is inappropriate. It is appropriate for an individual student to choose a project of a religious nature.

Religion In The Curriculum

Religious institutions and orientations are central to human experience, past and present. An education excluding such a significant aspect would be incomplete. It is essential that teaching about religion be conducted in a factual and respectful manner. Proselytizing for the intent of recruiting or to influence conversion to another belief is not permitted by any district employee.

Therefore, the practice of the school district shall be as follows:

1. The 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. The emphasis on religious themes in the arts, literature and history should be as extensive as is necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas. Such studies should never foster any particular religious beliefs or the lack of religious beliefs.
3. Student-initiated expressions to questions or assignments that reflect their beliefs or disbeliefs about a religious theme shall be accommodated. For example, students are free to express religious belief or disbelief in compositions, art forms, music, speech and debate.

Student Sensitivity

Holiday programs should be devised to serve an educational purpose for all students. Students should not feel excluded or identified with a religion not their own.

It is appropriate for teachers to explain the meaning of religious holidays and every effort must be made to obtain accurate information. Teachers should avoid a potentially embarrassing situation of asking students to explain their own religious practices, observances or beliefs; and teachers should not explain theirs.

In the elementary grades, students may be invited to bring objects to class for “show and tell” experiences. Objects or artifacts which are of a religious or holiday nature may be presented by students for “show and tell” or class discussion when the student initiates the action to do so.

<p>Pol. 204</p>	<p>Educational practices should neither advance nor inhibit specific religious beliefs. Therefore, alternative activities will be planned for students when parents/guardians or students themselves prefer not to participate.</p> <p><u>Classroom Parties/Gifts</u></p> <p>A party with a winter theme shall be scheduled for the last day of school before the December holiday season. The party should be neutral in tone and not reflect the religious holiday season.</p> <p>The building principal and building PTO/PTA representatives shall develop party guidelines that shall be shared with parents/guardians in advance. Two (2) additional parties may also be planned during the year by principals with the assistance of the PTO/PTA group associated with the school. Parties should serve as a social activity only.</p> <p>If a party involving costumes is planned for Halloween, the PTO/PTA group should determine the guidelines for appropriate costumes to be worn by children. Alternative activities should be planned and announced in advance for students whose parents/guardians prefer that they not participate in parties observing those holidays.</p> <p>Students should be encouraged to become involved in a charity or service project as a replacement for gift exchanges.</p> <p><u>School Calendar</u></p> <p>The district's calendar should be prepared to reduce conflicts with major religious holidays of all faiths as much as possible.</p> <p><u>School Attendance On Religions Holidays</u></p> <p>A student's absence from school on a religious holiday must be recognized as an excused absence, without a penalty. The scheduling of assemblies, field trips, graduation exercises and other special events, including school-related programs for parents/guardians such as Open House or PTO/PTA meetings should be avoided during religious holidays. Examinations should not be scheduled during religious holidays or the day of return after a holiday.</p> <p>A student missing school/class for religious holidays with permission of his/her parent/guardian shall be considered present with respect to records, perfect attendance, awards and grades.</p>
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	<p><u>Commencement</u></p> <p>The senior class officers shall decide whether an invocation shall be given at commencement. In the event it is decided that an invocation will be given, the invocation shall be given by a student volunteer designated by the senior class officers. In any case, the invocation must recognize the religious pluralism of the community and honor the spirit of accommodation.</p> <p><u>Baccalaureate Services</u></p> <p>The baccalaureate service is traditionally a religious celebration in nature, separate from commencement. It should be sponsored by the respective churches or synagogues within the community.</p> <p><u>Use Of School Facilities By Religious Organizations</u></p>
<p>Pol. 707</p>	<p>Religious organizations may use school facilities after school hours according to the district procedures and policies governing facility usage.</p> <p><u>Clergy, Churches, Synagogues And The Schools</u></p> <p>Clergy may be invited into the schools as a resource when teaching about religion.</p> <p>Clergy may be invited to present information at an after school sponsored educational program for parents/guardians.</p> <p>Churches, synagogues and/or clergy members representing families of the Fox Chapel Area School District may sponsor after school activities for students and parents/guardians. Announcements of such activities may be posted in the schools with permission of the principal as long as all students are invited to participate and the activities are not conducted for the purpose of proselytizing, recruiting or converting.</p> <p>Clergy members and/or their representatives shall not be permitted to meet informally or freely with individual or groups of students during the school day.</p>
<p>20 U.S.C. Sec. 4071 et seq</p>	<p><u>Equal Access Act</u></p> <p>Students shall have the right to a limited open forum on religious, political or philosophical issues involving only Fox Chapel Area School District secondary students.</p>

<p>SC 111 Title 22 Sec. 8.1 et seq 23 Pa. C.S.A. Sec. 6301 et seq</p> <p>20 U.S.C. Sec. 4071 et seq</p>	<p>The limited open forum will provide an opportunity for one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time. The principal shall determine the reasonable time, place and manner of regulation for the building’s limited open forum and enforce order and discipline during the meetings. Such time, place and manner of regulation must be uniform and nondiscriminatory. Nonschool persons may be invited to attend meetings occasionally, but the nonschool person may not direct, conduct, control or regularly attend activities of student groups. If the nonschool person is invited to attend a second meeting, the principal must have evidence of current Act 34, 151 and 114 clearances.</p> <p>Nonschool persons are not permitted to proselytize students at meetings to which the nonschool person is invited to attend.</p> <p>The principal may assign a teacher to a meeting for supervision purposes.</p> <p>To avoid any appearance of state endorsement of religion, the teacher must be present at student religious meetings only in a nonparticipatory capacity. The Equal Access Law prohibits teachers or other school employees from influencing the form or content of any prayer or other religious activity.</p> <p>Noncurriculum student groups shall not deny admission to their meeting based on religion, race, color, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, culture, or economic background.</p> <p>Groups that are unlawful or materially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities may be excluded.</p> <p>The district, in affording noncurriculum student groups an opportunity to meet, is merely making its facilities available.</p> <p>References:</p> <p>School Code – 24 P.S. Sec. 111</p> <p>State Board of Education Regulations – 22 PA Code Sec. 8.1 et seq.</p> <p>Child Protective Services Law – 23 Pa. C.S.A. Sec. 6301 et seq.</p> <p>Equal Access Act – 20 U.S.C. Sec. 4071 et seq.</p> <p>Board Policy – 204, 707</p>
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