

StudentsRecognition of Religious Holidays Policy

It is the policy of the Weston Public Schools to be neutral in matters of religion. This means that the Weston Public Schools shall assume no responsibility for the religious training of students. The school system shall respect the freedom of each student's conscience and shall not promote the religious belief, disbelief or uncertainty about religious matters of any student.

This requirement of neutrality will neither preclude nor hinder the Weston Public Schools from educating students to be tolerant of and to respect religious diversity. The recognition of religious holidays provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of different religions and customs. The goal of this endeavor shall be to promote tolerance, mutual respect and an understanding of the diversity that is our democratic society.

This shall be done, while observing the following cautions:

1. All religions whose holidays are recognized must be afforded equal respect.
2. The recognition of the holiday must be for secular, educational purposes. This will require activities which enhance tolerance through understanding, while not engaging students in religious ceremony, ritual or the promotion of any one religion.
3. The recognition of a religious holiday shall occupy a minor role in the curriculum. Therefore, class time shall be planned accordingly.
4. Parents may request, in writing, that their children be provided with an alternative experience rather than participate in activities related to religious holidays. This will be done without bias or embarrassment to the student.
5. Students with secular beliefs shall be free to express their views.
6. Periodic evaluation of the policy and its regulations shall take place.

StudentsRecognition of Religious Holidays**1.0 Curriculum Plan and Its Administration**

- 1.1 Time devoted to recognition of religious holidays shall be kept in perspective and represent a minor impact on the curriculum.
- 1.2 The principal and teachers shall organize and administer the recognition of religious holidays annually, taking into account the social studies curriculum plan, the Board's policy and these regulations.

**2.0 Classroom Activities, Decorations**

- 2.1 Goals for lessons shall include development of an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the religion and the holiday.
- 2.2 All lessons, activities and events involving religious holiday shall be secular in nature, not devotional, focusing on information and understanding of an important cultural and historical event for a significant number of people.
- 2.3 Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids, but will not become ongoing decorations in classrooms or common areas. Decorations in common areas will reflect the diversity in the school. Decorations that are part of the custom and folklore of a religious holiday, but have no direct religious meaning or significance, may be displayed.
- 2.4 No effort shall be made to indoctrinate or recruit students.
- 2.5 Parties, food preparation and other seasonal activities shall be permitted within the context of the curriculum.

StudentsRecognition of Religious Holidays (Continued)**3.0 Music and Art Experiences**

- 3.1 Performances in the arts that recognize religious holidays must be for artistic reasons, not religious reasons. Program notes or other commentary should inform the audience as to the educational purpose for using religious music or art.
- 3.2 Selections shall reflect the diversity in the school. Sacred music may be sung or played as part of the academic study of music. School concerts that present a variety of selections may include religious music. Concerts should avoid programs dominated by religious music, especially when they coincide with a particular religious holiday.
- 3.3 Students should not be assigned to produce art work that has religious meaning or significance unless in the context of an arts production. That which is spontaneously self produced is acceptable and may be displayed.

**4.0 Parents' Rights to Opt Out**

- 4.1 Parents shall have the right to request, in writing, that their children be provided an alternative to an educational experience or performance related to religious holidays without penalty.
- 4.2 Principals shall inform parents of programs and review their requests for an alternative experience.

**5.0 Observation of Religious Holidays Outside of School**

- 5.1 Absence from school to celebrate a religious holiday shall be an excused absence. Teachers shall not penalize students observing religious holidays. Major tests, evaluations, required homework and other important activities within reason shall not take place on these days for students observing those holidays.

**6.0 Advisory Committee**

- 6.1 An advisory committee shall assist the school system in matters related to religious holidays.