

Teaching About Religion-Regulation-Religious Holidays
Code No. 603.8R1

The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the program of education provided that such instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner. The selection of holidays to be recognized or studied shall take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities shall be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences, and shall be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time. Teachers shall be especially discriminating in planning activities that are to take place immediately preceding or on a religious holiday.

Music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes (including traditional carols, seasonal songs, and classical music) shall be permitted if presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. The emphasis on religious themes shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study or presentation. Religious content included in student performances shall be selected on the basis of its independent educational merit, and shall seek to give exposure to a variety of religious customs, beliefs, and forms of expression. Holiday programs, parties, or performances shall not become religious celebrations, or be used as a forum for religious worship, such as the devotional reading of sacred writings, or the recitations of prayers. Student participation in a program or performance which involves personally offensive religious material or expression shall be voluntary.

The use of religious symbols (e.g. cross, Menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene, or other symbol that is part of a religious ceremony) shall be permitted as a teaching aid, but only when such symbols are used temporarily and objectively to give information about a heritage associated with a particular religion. The Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Easter eggs, and Easter bunnies are secular, seasonal symbols and as such can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Expressions of belief or non-belief initiated by individual students shall be permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech, and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities, which are indoctrinational or force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or non-beliefs. In instances where many students might naturally choose to make a religious expression, alternate activities shall be offered.

Legal Reference: § 279.8; § 280.6; 112 S. Ct. 2649; 403 U.S. 602; 458 U.S. 179

Cross References

604.05	Religious-Based Exclusion from A School Program
606.02	School Ceremonies and Observances

Adopted:	03/03/1986
Reviewed:	02/10/2025
Revised:	02/10/2025