

DODGELAND SCHOOL DISTRICT
Board Policy Manual

381.1

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

The Dodgeland School Board shall, in matters of religion, uphold the federal and state constitutional provisions regarding the Establishment Clause and shall neither oppose nor promote any particular religious beliefs, tenets, or practices.

The Board further recognizes that views and opinions regarding the relationship of public schools and religion are diverse. While community opinions are important in shaping policy, the Board must give primary credence to the United States and Wisconsin State Constitutions and the decisions made by the respective courts when establishing guidelines for making decisions regarding religious-related activities and practices. The purpose of this policy is to preserve the rights of all students within the framework of the respective Constitutions. The Board expects the policy to be implemented accordingly in the District.

Holidays Associated with Religion

The Board allows individual buildings and teachers to observe traditional religious holidays or holiday seasons by celebrating the secular aspects. In choosing holiday activities designed to foster appreciation of diversity, teachers and principals shall assume diversity exists among the students and consider the social, emotional and cognitive development of the students. Activities shall have a secular educational purpose, not advance or inhibit religion, and avoid excessive entanglement with religion.

When a holiday has religious significance, the observance shall not be a religious event. The activities shall not require students to express assent to a particular belief system or participate in ceremonies traditionally performed in faith communities. Symbols, songs, and traditions shall be incorporated into the observances in a manner that remains neutral with respect to religion.

Religious holidays offer opportunities to teach about religion since such holidays sometimes have cultural significance. The cultural expressions about holidays associated with religion may be taught in the classroom as part of an integrated multicultural curriculum. The classroom teacher shall determine, within the normal process of the District, whether and how to teach students about such holidays. The curriculum and related activities shall be inclusive of all students and conform to the Board's policy on controversial issues.

Teaching about Religion and Religious Beliefs

The board also recognizes that one of the purposes of education is to advance the students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religious heritage has played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization. Teachers are permitted and encouraged to present students with information concerning religions and religious beliefs when it is appropriate to the established curriculum. No religious belief or non-belief shall be promoted by such instruction and none shall be disparaged.

Any instruction about religious matters or using religious materials shall be conducted in an objective, neutral, non-devotional manner and shall serve a secular educational purpose. Students may be taught about religion in a historical or comparative context or study the Bible, Koran, or other religious works. The use of religious symbols as examples of religious or cultural heritage is permissible as a teaching aid or resource. Religious symbols shall be displayed only on a temporary basis as part of the academic program. Materials and activities shall be sensitive to America's pluralistic society and reflect a balance of cultural diversity. Instruction shall educate rather than indoctrinate.

History, sociology, literature, the arts, and other disciplines taught in school may have religious dimensions. Within the context of these disciplines preferential or disparaging treatment shall not be

given to any single religion or to religion in general. The use of music, art, drama, or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves a secular educational goal in the curriculum and is not used to promote religious belief.

Students may express religious beliefs in assignments if suitable to the required form and purpose of the assignment and consistent with the teacher's directions. Students can express interests and beliefs in a variety of ways through art work, writing projects, literature and music selections. The teacher may not reject or correct assignments solely because these contain religious themes. Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion shall seek the same neutrality, objectivity, and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. Religious materials may be read during free reading times if these are not disruptive to the educational process.

School officials shall not allow anyone to teach religion on campus during the school day or distribute religious or anti-religious literature in the classroom. Guests may be invited to talk about religion at the teacher's discretion and with the knowledge of the building principal.

The curriculum and related activities shall conform to the Board's policy on controversial issues. The building principals are responsible for establishing additional appropriate procedures for incorporating the teaching about religions into the school curriculum. Students may be excused from participating in special curricular programs or classroom activities on the basis of their religious beliefs in accordance with established Board policies.

Music Instruction and Performances

Music teachers are expected to seek a balance of musical selections from different cultures and provide instruction in music that can be appreciated by a diverse community. Activities shall be developed based on the assumption of cultural pluralism and avoid the assumption that all share similar religious beliefs or have similar knowledge or cultural traditions.

Music activities, such as singing religious holiday songs, shall incorporate secular educational purposes including the presentation of information about the history and cultural traditions associated with the songs.

Student performances are an important part of the music curriculum. When performances are part of functions related to religious holidays, the teacher must apply the same guidelines and standards that apply to religious holiday observances. Performances related to religious holidays shall be balanced with performances for purely secular activities. Student participation in performances inspired by holidays associated with religion shall be optional.

Religious Expression

The District serves students with many religious beliefs systems, and students who do not believe in religion. The District respects the right of parents/guardians to educate their children in spiritual and religious matters. The interpretation of the spiritual significance of religious practices and holidays is the responsibility of families and religious institutions.

All students and staff shall be encouraged to appreciate and be tolerant of each other's religious views. Understanding and mutual respect among students, staff, and parents/guardians shall be fostered whether it involves race, culture, economic background, or religious beliefs. The perspectives of those who do not believe in religion or whose religions do not have holidays shall to be considered and introduced when developmentally appropriate for the students involved.

