

Guidelines

As we approach the winter holiday season, please remember that the ASD serves a diverse population and takes pride in our sensitivity to the various cultures that live in our community. As a public school system we are required by the U.S. Constitution to maintain religious neutrality. We should neither encourage nor discourage religious activity.

Please follow these guidelines as you plan your school activities for the holiday season and throughout the rest of the year.

1. You are permitted to teach about religious holidays and other occasions such as Christmas, Epiphany, Eid al-Fitr (Last Day of Ramadan), Vesak or Visakah Puja (Buddha Day), Passover and Diwali, without proselytizing, only if you are teaching about diverse religions and religious practices around the world. You may not inject personal religious beliefs into the classroom or denigrate any religious belief or practice.
2. All cultural experiences, events and parties must have a religiously neutral theme. The following questions should assist you in determining if the activity is religiously neutral.
 - a. Is the activity selected on the basis of its educational value rather than its religious context?
 - b. Are the traditions of different people shared and respected?
 - c. Does the event neither promote nor inhibit religious views?
 - d. Is there sensitivity to the various religious beliefs represented by the students and parents?
3. Concerts and music, whether during the holidays or not, must present a variety of music that represents various religious and cultural traditions. Although some religious music can be performed, it must not dominate the program. The cultural, not the worshipful aspects of a holiday, must be emphasized during any program, whether musical or not.
4. Even when the theme of a musical or other program is consistent with neutrality standards, parents may request that their children be excused from attending or participating in holiday events. Those requests should be granted and every attempt should be made to protect those children from embarrassment or peer pressure.
5. Religious symbols, if used in a classroom, must only be used in the context of studying the cultural and historical significance of the holiday or religious practices, and only for the duration of the study.

These guidelines are an attempt to more clearly articulate current policy and offer you assistance in determining the appropriateness of your activities. Please remember, the primary focus in the month of December as in all months should remain linked to your curricular standards. Let's continue our work towards reaching the School Board's goals of improving achievement for all students and eliminating the achievement gap.