

TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION

Purpose

The purpose of these regulations is to provide guidelines for all Colorado Springs School District 11 (the District) staff regarding the selection and use of religious material to insure that all staff members are in compliance with Colorado Springs School District 11 Board of Education (the Board) policy. If the staff is in compliance with these regulations, the staff is in compliance with Board policy.

Procedure

1. In order to ensure that the District upholds Constitutional standards within the religiously neutral role assigned to public schools, the following questions established by the United States Supreme Court should be asked of each school-sponsored activity involving the use of religious material.
 - a. Does the activity have a secular purpose?
 - b. Is the activity's primary effect one that neither advances nor inhibits religion?
 - c. Does the activity involve an excessive entanglement between the school and a religious organization?
2. In order to help the staff implement these standards, each staff member should ask the following questions before proceeding. The goal is to be able to respond "yes" to each question asked.
 - a. When religious material is used, is its use intrinsic to the learning experience? Is it presented objectively?
 - b. Is the role of using religious material one of neutrality, neither promoting nor inhibiting religious views?
 - c. Is the excessive use of religious material such as sacred music, religious symbols or scenery avoided?
 - d. Does the planning for seasonal programs and other classroom activities consider the various beliefs and sensitivities represented by the pluralistic society in which we live?
 - e. Is the activity presented in a balanced format through the careful selection of instructional resources?
 - f. Is the purpose and effect of the activity involving religious material to expose students to religious beliefs rather than to compel student affirmation or denial of religious beliefs?
 - g. Is the time allotted for an activity involving religious material adequate in order to

achieve the educational objective without prolonging the activity and thereby giving the religious material undue emphasis?

- h. Does the planning reflect a sensitivity to the age of the student?
- i. Is the approach to religious material academic, not devotional?
- j. Is the purpose of the activity to study about religion, not to sponsor the practice of religion?
- k. Is the purpose of the activity to educate about religion, not to promote or denigrate any religion?
- l. Is the purpose of the activity to inform the student about various beliefs or practices, not to seek to conform the student to any particular beliefs or practices?

Guidelines

In interpreting the accompanying policy, the following guidelines apply:

1. Religious material is defined as material involving but not limited to:
 - a. Religious content, ceremony or celebration
 - b. Reference to deities, invocation or devotion
 - c. Religious beliefs or tenets
 - d. Holy symbols or sacred writing
2. Activities, symbols or material may have both cultural and religious significance. When planning an activity or evaluating the use of materials or symbols, the religious attributes must be considered.
3. A program or lesson relating to a holiday season should focus on universal symbols and themes of the season without undue emphasis on religious symbols.
4. Religious heritages and their histories, arts, symbols and tenets may properly be included within a program of religiously neutral education. Such studies must be objective in nature and directly related to the broader educational purposes in the various fields of study.
5. In response to class questions and assignments, students are free to initiate expressions of religious belief or non-belief through compositions, art forms, music, speech and debate.
6. Students belonging to District-sponsored groups will not be compelled to perform as a part of a religious worship service.

7. When an activity involving religious material causes an objection, the activity should be re-evaluated according to Board policy and regulations. Providing an alternative activity or exempting the student does not eliminate the requirement to re-evaluate the activity.
8. When an activity complies with these regulations, an appropriate alternative activity should be provided for any student whose involvement would constitute a serious burden of conscience.

Severability

Each section of these regulations will be deemed severable from each other section, and if any section is found by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, the remaining sections will continue in full force and effect.

Approved June, 1989
Reviewed January, 2010
Reviewed May 27, 2015

CROSS REFS.: IB, Academic Freedom
IJJ, Instructional Resources and Materials Selection, Adoption, Acquisition, and Reconsideration
IJL, Library Media Section, Adoption, Acquisition, and Reconsideration
IMB, Teaching about Controversial/Sensitive Issues
IMBB, Exemptions from Required Instruction
JB, Equal Educational Opportunities
JJA, Student Organizations
KBE, Relations with Parent Organizations
KEB, Public Concerns/Complaints about Personnel
KEC, Public Concerns/Complaints about Instructional and Library Resources