

Superintendent Procedure 2340SP

Religion and Religious Accommodation

Approved by: s/S. Enfield Date: 12/14/11

Dr. Susan Enfield, Interim Superintendent



Instruction Related to Religion

Factual and objective teaching about religion, the impact of religion, and religious-based ideas and ideals may be included in classroom instruction in relation to the district's educational goals and student learning objectives. It is inherent to the teaching of history, literature, social studies, intercultural education, human relations, art, and music to include the contributions of religions and religious movements to this field.

Factual and objective teaching about religion is to be distinguished from the teaching or promotion of religion. Consequently, the legitimate teaching about religion can be conducted, but shall not:

1. Utilize instructional materials that promote or encourage non-religion, religion, religious viewpoints, religious groups, or religious activities.
2. Include assemblies and/or programs that promote or encourage religion or non-religion.
3. Take the form of religious instruction, worship, exercise, or persuasion.
4. Attack or promulgate religion or the absence of religion or any particular belief system.
5. Question the religious belief or absence of religious belief of any student.
6. Require a student to declare a religious preference.

The teaching about religion should be done with sensitivity to the feelings and beliefs of all students. The teaching about religion should be consistent with the district's educational program and with student learning objectives.

Displays and Music

Classroom displays and decorations pertaining to religion or religious symbol(s) or holiday(s) should relate to instruction that is based solely upon the objective study of that subject. No public school funds, property, or facilities shall be used for a decorative display of religious symbols. This procedure shall not infringe upon the rights of students to wear religious symbols in a manner that is not materially and substantially disruptive to the educational process.

Religious musical selections may be included on the basis of their particular musical and educational value and/or traditional secular usage and be presented in concert with other musical works, which are non-religious in nature. Musical pieces should be selected and performed as works of art, not as acts of veneration. Program notes or oral narration shall be provided. These notes should establish an objective context for the performance by giving such information as historical data, identification of the particular groups for which the number has significance, and technical characteristics worthy of note.

Religious Accommodations - Students

In order for students to be granted a religious accommodation, the student's parent/guardian must submit a written request to the principal of the student's school. Such requests should be submitted well enough in advance to allow the school to make appropriate arrangements and scheduling adjustments. If the request is for an excused absence for a religious event, that request must be made at least three days in advanced of the start of the planned absence in accordance with the district's Attendance Procedure. The written request must state:

- 1) The specific accommodation requested;
- 2) Why the accommodation is needed; and
- 3) The amount of time, duration, and frequency of the accommodation.

School personnel shall make a good faith effort to accommodate such requests in a reasonable amount of time, with due consideration given to the law, the responsibility and policies of the Seattle School district, and the educational program of the school and of the individual student. The primary factors to be considered in determining if a request is to be granted are: the amount of time, duration, and frequency of the accommodation being requested as well as if any disruption to the learning of others will result by granting the request. Parents/guardians have a correlative duty to cooperate in reaching an agreement on a reasonable accommodation. To the extent possible, students are encouraged to fulfill their religious obligations during lunch or a free period.

The district also desires to cooperate with those parents/guardians who wish to provide for religious instruction for their children but also recognizes its responsibility to enforce the attendance requirements of the state. Where reasonable and educationally feasible, individual student schedules may be adjusted to accommodate religious instruction outside the school building.

Students who are excused from class as a religious accommodation must have an opportunity to make up any work, assignment or test missed as a result of the absence. If the school personnel anticipate denying a request for a religious accommodation for a student, they should consult with the General Counsel's Office prior to communicating that denial.

Religious Accommodations - Staff

The district can accommodate requests that do not impose an undue hardship upon the district or that do not fundamentally alter the job duties of the requesting staff member. For example, the district would not be able to accommodate a FTE teacher's request to have every Friday off to participate in a religious observance, as presence during entire school the school week is a fundamental job duty of a FTE teacher. 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(e)(1).

Staff should address requests for a religious accommodation to their immediate supervisor or to the district's Human Resource department.

Approved: December 2011
Revised:
Cross Reference: Policy No. 2340