

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

POLICY 6141.2

THE USE OF CULTURAL, ETHNIC, OR RELIGIOUS THEMES IN OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

We believe that it is our responsibility as educators to foster mutual understanding and respect for the rights of all individuals regarding their beliefs, values, and customs. In pursuing this goal the Board recognizes that we have a diverse community with a variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and we are cognizant of the special significance of seasonal observances and religious holidays.

The Board also recognizes that a genuine and broad secular program of education is furthered by advancement of students' knowledge about our society's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Inclusion of this area of knowledge helps to achieve our district's educational goals.

Through our instructional programs, we shall seek to broaden our students' understanding of, and respect for, the many beliefs and customs stemming from our diverse multicultural community's religious, racial, ethnic and cultural heritage. While one cannot study the richness of civilization without studying about religion, it is essential that those studies be conducted with sensitivity to the many religious beliefs existing within our student population; they must also remain consistent with law as interpreted by state and federal courts in accordance with the Constitution of the United States. Programs which teach about religion and its role in the social and historical development of civilization and in the social and political context of world events do not violate the religious neutrality of the public schools. Schools may teach about but not promote religion. The inclusion of religious themes in the study of the arts, literature, and history shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas.

The district supports the inclusion of cultural, ethnic and religious literature, music, drama and the arts in the curriculum and in school activities, so long as such inclusion reinforces our secular educational goal of providing a valuable learning experience. A wide variety of activities shall be included throughout the year.

Staff members are responsible for creating the school atmosphere and for demonstrating interest, sensitivity and support, so that students may see that different customs and beliefs are wonderful and essential elements of a pluralistic society.

Legal References: *N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties*
 N.J.S.A. 18A:36-16 Rules regarding religious holidays
 N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)

U.S.C.A. Const. Amends. 1, 14

20 U.S.C.A. 4071 - Equal Access Act

Florey v. Sioux Falls School District, 619 F.2d. 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)

Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, 104 S.Ct. 1355, 79 L.E.D. 2d 604 (1984)

Edwards v. Aguillard, 482 U.S. 578 S.Ct. 2573, 96 L.E.D. 2d 510 (1987)

Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. ___, 112 S.Ct. 2649, 120 L.E.D. 2d 467 (1992)

American Civil Liberties Union v. Blackhorse Pike Regional Board of Education, F. 2d (3d Cir. 1996)
(No. 94-5233 decided May 24, 1996)

Adopted: October 18, 1993

Renumbered: February 27, 2001