

## **Instruction**

### **Ceremonies, Religious Observances and Displays**

In accordance with the mandate of the Constitution of the United States prohibiting the establishment of religion, it is the policy of this Council that district schools/programs will, at all times and in all ways, be neutral in matters of religion. No religious belief or non-belief will be promoted by the district or its employees and none will be disparaged, and students will be educated to be tolerant and respectful of religious diversity.

The Council also recognizes that one of its educational goals 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. Accordingly, CREC schools/programs will approach religion from an objective, curriculum-related perspective.

CREC schools/programs will accommodate student exercise of religious beliefs, provided that such accommodation does not place an undue burden on a school or program, substantially disrupt the learning environment or infringe upon the rights of others.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Studies

10-16a Silent Meditation

PA 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance

Policy adopted: June 18, 2003  
 Revised: February 16, 2005  
 Revised: March 20, 2019

CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL  
 Hartford, Connecticut

**Instruction**

**Ceremonies, Religious Observances and Displays**

**Separation of Church and State**

CREC schools/programs will approach religion from an objective, curriculum-related perspective:

- Holidays throughout the year that have a religious and a secular basis may be observed in the schools.
- Recognition of religious holidays will not dominate the educational program and must support curricular objectives.
- Teaching staff must be alert to the distinction between teaching about religion or religious holidays, which is permissible, and fostering religion or celebrating religious holidays, which is not. Teaching should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs or the absence thereof, and should be conducted in a factual, objective and respectful manner.
- The historical and contemporary values and the origin of religious holidays may be explained in an unbiased and objective manner aimed at educating students about history and cultures, without sectarian indoctrination. Learning opportunities should extend beyond Judeo-Christian beliefs, and reflect the diversity of global cultures.
- Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes or basis are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if they serve an educational goal and are not a vehicle for promoting religious belief.
- Holiday programs must serve an educational purpose for all students, without making students feel excluded or identified with a religion that is not their own. Performances which recognize holidays must be of an artistic nature, not religious. Religious music must not dominate any school program. Program selections should not, by their nature, exclude students from participation.
- Students and staff members should be excused from participating in activities that are contrary to their religious beliefs unless there are clear issues of compelling public interest that would prevent it.
- Holiday decorations should focus on seasonal, rather than religious, themes.
- The cafeteria staff will consider religious dietary restrictions when planning menus (non-meat meals, limiting pork to one menu choice).

### **Opening exercises**

Each homeroom and elementary class shall conduct exercises each school day including the Pledge of Allegiance, reading of announcements and notices, and a moment of silent meditation for those students and teachers who wish to avail themselves of such time for such purpose.

Participation in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance will be voluntary. Students may refuse to participate in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance for any reason, including religious, political, philosophical, or personal. If a student chooses not to participate, he/she may stand or sit in silence.

### **Religious Accommodation**

CREC schools/programs will accommodate student exercise of religious beliefs, provided that such accommodation does not place an undue burden on a school or program, substantially disrupt the learning environment or infringe upon the rights of others. Areas of accommodation may include:

- Students will be allowed a reasonable number of excused absences, without penalties, to observe religious holidays within their traditions. Students may be asked to complete makeup assignments or examinations in conjunction with such absences.
- Parents may exclude their children from programs involving the recognition of religious holidays or if celebration is in conflict with family beliefs. A written request for exclusion should be submitted to the Principal.
- The cafeteria staff will consider religious dietary restrictions when planning menus (non-meat meals, limiting pork to one menu choice).
- Students may be exempted from instruction, in accordance with CREC policy 6144.1.
- Student-initiated, non-curriculum-related student groups shall be permitted to conduct voluntary meetings on school grounds during non-instructional time when other non-curriculum groups are permitted to meet, regardless of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at the meetings, provided that the meetings do not materially or substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of the educational activities of the school. Such meetings shall be open to all students without regard to race, color, religion or national origin and must meet the criteria established in CREC Policy 6145.
- Individual students may pray, provided there is no disruption to school activities.

**Notices and compliance**

The Building Principal is responsible for monitoring compliance with this regulation and accompanying policy. Pertinent information will be included in the student, parent, and staff handbooks.

The Executive Director will ensure compliance with all legally required notices and certifications to state and federal agencies, including those related to constitutionally protected prayer.

Regulation adopted: March 20, 2019

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Hartford, Connecticut