

The Board of Trustees recognizes that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in society. As appropriate for a particular course, teachers may objectively discuss the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with culture, literature, or the arts. The Board expects that such instruction will identify principles common to all religions and foster respect for the diversity of religions and customs in the world and be consistent with the adopted instructional materials and state standards, as applicable.

In order to respect each student's individual right to freedom of religious practice, religious indoctrination is forbidden in public schools. The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that instruction about religion does not promote or denigrate the beliefs or customs of any particular religion or sect, nor that a preference be shown for one religious viewpoint over another. Teachers and other district staff shall be highly sensitive to their obligation not to interfere with the religious development of any student in whatever tradition the student embraces, and treat all religions and religious convictions, including nonbelief, with fairness and respect.

Staff shall not endorse, encourage, or solicit religious or anti-religious expression or activities among students during class time.

Staff shall not coerce students in prayer or other religious activities as part of their official duties. However, staff are not prohibited, when acting in their private capacity, from encouraging students' participation in personal prayer or other religious activity. Additionally, staff shall not prohibit or discourage any student from praying or otherwise expressing the student's religious belief so long as this does not disrupt the classroom or other district-sponsored activity.

Students may express their beliefs about religion in their homework, artwork, and other class work if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards, relevance, and other legitimate pedagogical objectives.

While teaching about religious holidays is a permissible part of the educational program, celebrating religious holidays is not allowed in the district. District-sponsored programs shall not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration. School and classroom decorations may express seasonal themes that are not religious in nature. The use of religious symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided that such symbols are displayed as an example of cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and temporary in nature.

Classroom methods in instruction about religion shall not include religious role-playing activities or simulated religious devotional acts.

Music, art, literature or drama programs having religious themes are permitted as part of the curriculum for district-sponsored activities and programs if presented in an objective manner and as a traditional part of cultural and religious heritage.

District schools shall not prohibit religious activities if the same or similar non-religious activities are permitted.

When required by law, the district shall notify parents/guardians that they may, via written request, opt their students out of instruction on the basis of their religious beliefs as specified in the accompanying administrative regulation. Students whose parents/guardians opt them out of such instruction may be offered an alternative activity of similar educational value. Additionally, a student shall not be subject to disciplinary action, academic penalty, or other sanction on the grounds that the student was opted out of such instruction.

#### References

Policy Reference Disclaimer: These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the Governing Board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.

#### EDUCATION CODE

38130-38139 Civic Center Act

46014 Absences for religious purposes

51240 Excuse from instruction due to religious beliefs

51511 Religious matters properly included in courses of study

51930-51939 California Healthy Youth Act

#### UNITED STATES CODE

20 USC 4071-4074 Equal Access Act

20 USC 6061 School prayer

20 USC 7904 School prayer

#### DECISIONS

Mahmoud v. Taylor (2025) 606 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2025 WL 1773627)

Florey v. Sioux Falls (1980) 619 F.2d 1311

Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified School District Board of Education (2023)  
82 F.4th 664

Kennedy v. Bremerton (2022) 142 S.Ct. 2407

Cole v. Oroville Union High School District (2000, 9th Cir.) 228 F.3d 1092

Lassonde v. Pleasanton Unified School District (2003, 9th Cir.) 320 F.3d 979

Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971) 403 U.S. 602

**PUBLICATIONS**

California Department of Education Publication      Appendix F history social science framework for California public schools

U.S. Department of Education Publication      Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, May 2023

**WEBSITES**

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The Superintendent or designee shall ensure the following for the recognition of religious beliefs and customs in district schools:

1. The approach to religion is academic and not devotional
2. The goal is for student awareness of religion in historical and contemporary societies
3. The students may not be pressed to accept any one religion
4. The school may include the study of religion as part of the history-social science curriculum, but the practice of religions may not be sponsored
5. The students may be exposed to and educated about a diversity of religious views and beliefs, but a particular view or belief may not be imposed, nor may any one religion be promoted or denigrated

Staff shall make every effort to schedule one-time events, such as examinations, district-sponsored trips, special laboratories, picture-taking days, and class parties, to minimize conflicts with major religious holidays of all faiths such that no one faith is disproportionately impacted.

### **Programs and Exhibits**

When district programs and exhibits are in any way related to instruction about religion or religious holidays, the following guidelines shall be observed:

1. The principal or designee shall ensure that district-sponsored programs are presented in an objective manner, consistent with the accompanying Board policy
2. The principal or designee shall be kept informed of the program's development
3. Program or exhibit planners shall take into consideration the diverse religious faiths represented in the community, student body, and staff

### **Opt-Outs**

When a parent/guardian submits a written request to opt the parent's/guardian's student out of instruction based on religious beliefs, customs, or practices, the request shall include the following:

1. The specific instructional content of which the student should be opted out

2. The specific religious belief(s), custom(s), and/or practice(s) with which the specific instructional content substantially interferes
3. How the specific instructional content substantially interferes with the specific religious belief(s), custom(s), and/or practice(s), including any grade level or individual student characteristics relevant to the opt-out request

As necessary, the Superintendent or designee may work with district legal counsel to evaluate each opt-out request and determine whether it shall be granted.

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