

516 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to identify the status of religion and how it pertains to the programs of Stonebridge World School.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. SBWS shall neither promote nor disparage any religious belief or nonbelief. Instead, SBWS encourages all students and employees to have appreciation for the tolerance of each other's view.

B. SBWS also recognizes that religion has had and continues to have a significant role in the social, cultural, political, and historical development of civilization.

C. SBWS recognizes that one of its educational objectives is to increase its students' knowledge and appreciation of music, art, drama, and literature which may have had a religious basis or origin as well as a secular importance.

D. SBWS supports the inclusion of religious music, art, drama, and literature in the curriculum and in school activities provided it is intrinsic to the learning experience and is presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.

E. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of various religions, holidays, customs, and beliefs may be explained in an unbiased and nonsectarian manner.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

A. It shall be the responsibility of the Director to ensure that the study of religious materials, customs, beliefs, and holidays is in keeping with the following guidelines:

1. The proposed activity must have a secular purpose.
2. The primary objective of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.
3. The activity must not foster excessive governmental relationships with religion.

4. Notwithstanding the foregoing guidelines, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate any student who wishes to be excused from attendance at school for the purpose of religious instruction or observance of religious holidays.

B. The Director is granted authority to develop and present for School Board review and approval directives and guidelines for the purpose of providing further guidance relative to the teaching of materials related to religion. Approved directives and guidelines shall be attached as an addendum to this policy.

Adopted: 11/21/2012
Revised: 12/11/2017

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RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS REGULATIONS

1. Teaching About Religions

Teaching about religion must be clearly distinguished from teaching religion, which amounts to religious indoctrination and practice and is clearly prohibited in public schools. Religion may be presented as part of a secular educational program, with the goal of teaching students about the role of religion in the historical, cultural, economic, and social development of the United States and other nations. This approach seeks to promote understanding, tolerance, and respect for religious diversity. The same approach is applied to the study of the sacred literature of religions. They are studied as significant documents which present the important literary expression of a given religious tradition. They are also studied for the effects they have on the religious communities and cultures in which they have been or are operative.

2. Musical Programs/Concerts

Musical programs prepared or presented under school auspices should be planned with sensitivity to the views of all members of the community. Such programs should not be religious or religious-holiday oriented. Schools may include selections of religious music, both choral and instrumental, provided they are presented in a broad concert or program setting that is not religiously oriented, such as a program that includes religious and nonreligious holiday music from various cultures and religions. Religious selections should not constitute a majority of the concert. For these purposes, religious selections, especially choral selections, are defined as having religious or religion-oriented texts, but which are used for their musical value and not because of the meaning or inference of the words used in the selections.

3. Religious Symbols

A religious symbol is any object that portrays or recognizes the existence of a supreme being or deity, or any object that is so closely associated with religion or religions or with the celebration of a religious holiday that it is looked upon by a segment of the population as being of a religious nature. Religious symbols are sacred to particular faiths.

Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids in the academic study about religions. Their display in the classroom should be for temporary periods only, when appropriate for educational purposes. Religious symbols should not be displayed in offices, reception areas, or other public spaces where the display is not linked to the academic study about religions.

4. Advertising Religious Activities

Schools shall not permit the advertising of religious activities or the distribution of religious literature except when directly related to the academic study about religions.

5. Student Absences Due to Religious Holidays

Schools must ensure that students who are absent from school for religious holiday observances are not unduly burdened or otherwise penalized for the schoolwork they have missed. In particular, care should be taken to avoid the scheduling of special projects, the introduction of new information/new learning, and other activities that would be difficult for students to make up. If tests are given on days when students may be absent for religious holidays, adequate time must be given after their return to school to prepare for and make up these tests. Conversely, the students who remain in school should continue to have meaningful learning experiences.

Schools should ensure that sensitive and respectful methods are employed to identify students who will be absent from school for a particular religious holiday observance.