

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

The guidelines below shall be followed in implementing formal curriculum and in providing information on holidays which have cultural, ethnic or religious significance. The primary purpose of all material used to provide such information on holidays shall be to promote the educational goal of advancing student knowledge.

1. Information about holidays which have cultural, ethnic or religious significance must be contained in the written curriculum of the Holmdel Township Public Schools and must be approved by the Board of Education.
 - a. The written curriculum will be compiled by educators from the Holmdel Township Public Schools under the leadership of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.
 - b. The written curriculum will contain accurate information about the holidays as well as goals, objectives, instructional activities, relevant resources, timelines and assessment techniques.
 - c. An instructional unit including religious or cultural themes need not necessarily be confined to any specific holiday season, but may be presented at such time during the school year that is appropriate to the curriculum.
 - d. Sensitivity to the diverse cultural backgrounds represented in the community should be an important guideline in selecting instructional materials and resources and in presenting the instructional program.
 - e. Relevant resources from the community and other sources may be utilized in the development of the curriculum.
 - f. The material contained in the curriculum must have educational merit and be linked to the educational goals of the Holmdel Township Public Schools.
 - g. The curriculum about holidays must be approached from an academic perspective with the intended purpose of advancing the knowledge of all students about history, cultures and traditions.

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- h. The curriculum should contain specific guidelines for parents and other community residents who may be involved in holiday discussions or recognition.
 - i. The written curriculum about holidays must foster mutual understanding and respect for the rights of all individuals regarding their beliefs, values and customs while being consistent with law as interpreted by state and federal courts in accordance with the Constitution of the United States.
 - j. The study of each holiday or unit of holidays shall be limited to specific timeframes appropriate for the depth and breadth of material. These timeframes will be noted in the written curriculum.
 - k. Prior to its implementation in classrooms of the Holmdel Township Public Schools, the curriculum must be submitted by the Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Education for review and approval.
2. A variety of resources including, but not limited to books, posters, costumes, music, artwork, guest speakers (other than religious leaders) and performers, videotapes, CD ROMs, and religious symbols may be utilized by the teaching staff in the instructional program about holidays.
- a. Resources must be identified in the Board-approved curriculum following the review and recommendation of the Board's Ad Hoc Study Team for Holiday Policy.
 - b. Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids as long as they are identified in the Board-approved curriculum and if they are temporarily displayed.
 - c. Within the classroom, displays of religious symbols are permissible provided such symbols are part of the planned program of instruction and comply with the criteria below:
 - are displayed as an educational example of the holiday's cultural, ethnic, and/or religious significance; and
 - remain on display within a timeframe that corresponds to the unit being taught.
 - d. The primary purpose and effect of all displays shall be to promote the educational goal of advancing student knowledge about cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage and diversity; such displays shall not appear to promote or celebrate any single religion or religious holiday.

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- e. Since it is more meaningful for children to learn about and become aware of cultural, ethnic, and religious customs and traditions of others during the appropriate season, it shall be permissible to decorate one central school location with appropriate displays. The decorations and symbols used for such a display shall be examples of the cultural, ethnic, and/or religious holiday(s) that fall within a particular month. Any religious symbol which may be used shall be displayed simultaneously with at least one other religious symbol and at least one cultural and/or ethnic symbol when appropriate according to the holiday list approved by the Board of Education. Any such display shall be accompanied by a written explanation, approved by the building principal and Director of Curriculum and Instruction, that describes the cultural, ethnic, or religious significance of the symbols used in the display. The primary purpose of all such displays shall be to promote the educational goal of advancing student knowledge about cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage and diversity.
 - f. Additionally, throughout the school year, on a temporary basis, bulletin boards may be decorated with pictorial displays that recognize national and international holidays.
 - g. If parents, community residents or other individuals are to participate in holiday discussions or recognition activities as identified in the Board-approved curriculum, specific guidelines shall be provided a minimum of one-week in advance. Parents, residents or others may not use the opportunity to proselytize or inject personal religious beliefs into the discussions or recognition activities.
3. Staff development experiences will be provided to the faculty members who will be implementing the holiday curriculum and to the administrators of these teachers.
- a. The staff development will include, but not be limited to a discussion about the Board's policy and regulation #6141.2 The Use of Cultural, Ethnic or Religious Themes in the Educational Program, a copy of which will be placed in the faculty handbooks of each school in the district.
 - b. Staff will be made aware that they should avoid asking students to explain their own religious practices and observances unless these comments are made unsolicited.

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- c. Staff will also be made aware that in teaching the holiday curriculum, it would be improper to proselytize or inject personnel religious beliefs into the discussion.
4. Any school musical program or concert composed of several choral and instrumental selections, shall have secular educational value and shall not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously-oriented or a religious celebration. While individual religious pieces of music may be performed for their musical value, the total effect of a music program or concert shall be non-religious.
5. Parents will be made aware of the Board's policy and regulation #6141.2 The Use of Cultural, Ethnic or Religious Themes in the Educational Program as well as the holiday curriculum through such means as the annual district handbook/calendar, student handbooks, and parent organizations'/principals' newsletters.
6. The school shall honor written requests from parents/guardians to the building principal that children be excused from any activity the parents deem objectionable on religious grounds, and will provide an alternative activity for any child so excused. Such activities shall be handled with sensitivity.
7. Any student, staff member, parent/guardian, or community member who believes that a particular school program, practice or employee may have violated or misapplied Policy 6141.2 may submit a written complaint to the Superintendent, who will form a staff committee, which will include, but not be limited to, the building principal involved, to review the matter in question in a timely fashion.

Source: Regular Board Meeting

Date: September 28, 1994

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