

## Education Program

Series 600

Policy Title: Teaching About Religion

Code No. 603.8

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Since the contribution of religions to civilizations is one of the crucial keys to understanding human history and development, the study of religious history and traditions should be part of the school curriculum and can play a vital role in enhancing an understanding among people of different religious backgrounds and beliefs. Such study should give neither preferential nor derogatory treatment to any single religion or to religion in general and should not be introduced or utilized for devotional purposes. Furthermore, no religious belief or non-belief should be promoted by the school district or its employees.

Criteria used to guide academic inquiry in the study of religion should seek the same objectivity and educational effectiveness expected in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, materials and activities should be sensitive to America's pluralistic society and should educate rather than indoctrinate. All instructional and other school-sponsored activities should meet the three-part test established by the Supreme Court to determine constitutionality: (1) the activity must have a secular purpose; (2) the activity's principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) the activity must not foster an excessive governmental entanglement with religion.

Regarding the district's policy in general as to religion, the following principles shall apply:

- 1) The district shall be neutral in matters of religion and may not discriminate

against or show preference toward one religion over another.

- 2) The district may not promote any religion.
- 3) The district may not express opposition or hostility toward religion, or any religion.
- 4) Nothing in the above is intended to proscribe teaching about religion or religions in an objective manner as distinguished from the sponsorship of religion or promotion of any specific system of religious thought. There may be the study of religion and religions, but not the sponsorship of the practice of religion. The approach to religion shall be one of instruction, not one of indoctrination. The purpose is to educate, not convert. The effort is an academic one, not a devotional one. The focus shall be on the study of what people believe and must not be on teaching a student what to believe.
- 5) The district's policy in regard to religion is based upon the proposition that the responsibility for religious training lies with the home, church, synagogue, or mosque, and consequently, is not a responsibility of the public schools which must be neutral regarding matters of religion.

Adopted: January 25, 1988

Reviewed: June 1, 2009  
June 16, 2014  
October 1, 2018

Amended: April 8, 1991

Cross Reference: 603 Instructional Curriculum  
604.5 Religious-Based Exclusion from a School Program  
606.2 School Ceremonies and Observances

Legal Reference: (Code of Iowa)

U.S. Const. amend. I.

Lee v. Weisman. 112 S.Ct. 2649 (1992).

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

Graham v. Central Community School District of Decatur County, 608 F.Supp. 531 (S.D. Iowa 1985).

Iowa Code §§ 279.8; 280.6 (2013).