

Harvard Public Schools

Policy Guidelines Regarding Educational Activities and Religious Holidays

The goal of this policy is to encourage community understanding, tolerance, and respect for our pluralistic society. Sensitivity to the religious, cultural, racial, and other differences among students is paramount. Any school programs relating to religious holiday observances should serve an educational purpose for all students and make no student feel excluded.

In accordance with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which affirms the basic American tradition of separation of church and state, the Public Schools of Harvard shall ensure that no practices are allowed in the schools which convey their endorsement or disapproval of any religion or religions, nor sponsor any activity which promotes or disparages any religion or religions. Students shall not be solicited in school by teachers or staff to participate in any form of religious devotion to take place either before, during, or after school.

Music programs given at times close to religious holidays should not use religious aspects of these holidays as the underlying motive or theme. Although religious music is appropriate in the schools to the extent that it is sung or presented for musical rather than religious content, its use should not violate the secular nature of the school. Pageants, plays, recitals, and other literary or dramatic activities should not be used to convey religious messages. While religious holidays represent a valid source of ideas for meaningful school art experiences, teachers should avoid assigning or encouraging artwork that promotes religious aspects of such holidays. If, however individual students choose to use a religious personage, event, or symbol as the vehicle for an artistic expression, they should be allowed to take this action.

Any parent or guardian of a student in the schools who has a serious concern about the implementation of this policy should first address this concern to the staff member who is responsible for such implementation. Should that parent or guardian find his/her concern not addressed satisfactorily, he/she may pursue it with the principal of the school.

Approved: December 13, 2010