

The United States Constitution and the New Hampshire State Constitution and related court rulings clearly establish the concept of “church and state separation” and the “preclusion of sectarian instruction in public schools.”

In order to help staff members abide by the spirit and letter of the law, and to avoid compromising any student’s religious or conscientious beliefs or freedoms, the following guidelines have been established:

1. The observance of religious holidays is not the responsibility of the public schools;
2. Since a public school is not a place of worship, the instructional materials, activities, decorations, or assembly programs that are introduced into the schools should not promote any religion; and
3. While it is recognized that many activities are initiated with the approach of major holidays in order to capitalize on the readiness and interest that is generated at these times, it should be understood that such occasions frequently have religious underpinnings. Care should be taken to relate only to the secular aspects of these holidays.
  - (a) Music programs given at times close to religious holidays should not use the religious aspect 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.
  - (b) Pageants, plays, recitals, and other literary or dramatic activities should not be used to convey religious messages.
  - (c) While the 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.

The above statements should not be interpreted to preclude the factual and objective teaching about religions, religious holidays, and religious differences. Such instruction will be permitted in the schools since insights in this area can enhance the mutual understanding needed by all citizens in a pluralistic society.

Law Reference:

Appendix Reference:

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