

Bylaws of the Board

Religious Guidelines

A legal and logical distinction exists between teaching about religion and practicing religion. Public schools may not sponsor the practice of religion, but it is legally permissible and educationally responsible to ensure that study about religion occurs in the public school curricula.

To teach about religion is not to instruct in religion. Teaching about religion should be grounded in appreciation of the nature and variety of religious experiences from a historical, literary and cultural perspective. In light of these principles, the following are guidelines for teaching about religion in the Stafford Public Schools:

I. Procedural Guidelines

- To determine the constitutionality of an activity and/or materials, all three of the following questions must be answered in the affirmative:
 - A. **Purpose:** Is the purpose of the activity related to curriculum objectives?
 - B. **Effect:** Is the effect of the activity one that does not promote religion?
 - C. **Excessive Entanglement:** Does the activity not require or involve excessive relationship between the school and religious organization?
- Unique instructional events such as examinations and special presentations should not be scheduled on major religious holidays.
- Coercion of students on school property is prohibited.

III. Instructional Guidelines

- All programs and materials related to holidays **must** support curriculum objectives.
- Teachers should be able to distinguish between teaching **about** the religious holidays which is permissible and **celebrating** religious holidays which is not.
- Programs should educate students about the principle of religious liberty.
- The study of the Bible and other sacred writings is permissible for analysis of their literary and historic significance.
- The study of religious art or music as part of the study of history including lands and culture is appropriate.