

I-18 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, CUSTOMS AND HOLIDAYS

The Opelika City Schools System recognizes that one of its educational goals is to advance the students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that religion has played and continues to play in the social, cultural and historical development of civilization. The social studies course of study adopted by the State Board of Education prescribes minimum content for public school instruction in K-12 social studies. The course of study is based on the idea that, "unlike other nations, America is not united by religious, ethnic or racial likeness. Its binding heritage is a democratic vision of liberty, equality and justice." The course of study is an appropriate guide for the development of social studies instruction in the school system, including instruction in religious beliefs, customs and holidays.

School system practices should encourage all students and staff members to appreciate and be tolerant of the religious views of others. It is understood that no religious belief or non-belief should be promoted or disparaged in the curriculum or by the school district or its employees.

To provide a guide for teachers and administrators, the following guidelines are established:

- The historical and contemporary values associated with the origin of religions may be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.
- Music, art and literature having religious themes or bases are permitted as part of the cultural and religious heritage studies provided they are intrinsic to the learning experience in the various fields of study.
- Presentations of religious themes during school sponsored activities and programs should be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study. Such studies should never foster any particular religious tenets or demean any religious beliefs.
- Student-initiated expression to questions or assignments which reflect their beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme shall be accommodated. For example, students are free to express religious beliefs or non-belief in compositions, art forms, music, speech and debate.

- The use of religious symbols such as cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, angels, crèche, symbols of Native American religions or other symbols are permitted as teaching aides or resources provided such symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.
- The baccalaureate services associated with graduation activities are traditionally religious in nature, and therefore, will be sponsored by agencies separate from the Opelika City Schools.
- A study of various days of religious observances may be included in instructional programs provided that such study is balanced in content and not doctrinaire in presentation.

The intent of the preceding policy and guidelines is to recognize and incorporate into the course of study the important role that religion plays in societies and cultures. The intent is to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Further, the intent of the policy and the guidelines is to foster understanding of the diversity of religions within and among societies and cultures. And, most importantly, the intent is to prescribe a course of study and related activities that provide educational experiences in these areas while not prescribing directly or indirectly a single religion, belief or observance. Thus, all students are expected to participate in approved courses of study in these areas.

ADOPTED: May 11, 2004

LEGAL REF: Code of Alabama 16-11-20; 16-12-9; U.S. Const. Amend. I; U.S.

Const. Amend. IV, 1; 20 U.S.C.A. 4071