

CHAPTER 4.00 – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

4.45

- I. Curriculum – the curriculum of the schools may include a study of the Bible or of religion when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, consistent with the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This may include a study of the literature of religions; religious sects; comparative religion; and the role of religion in history, literature, art, and music.
 - A. Any separate course about religion shall be elective.
 - B. State-Adopted Sunshine State Standards Curriculum Frameworks and Student Performance Standards shall provide the basis of the curriculum.
 - C. Qualified staff appointed by the School Board shall select appropriate instructional materials and teach the course.
- II. School calendar and student absences
 - A. The school year calendar shall be planned to avoid conflict with religious holidays as much as practicable.
 - B. Student absences for observance of religious holidays shall not be penalized in any manner.
 1. Assignments and tests shall be planned by principals and teachers to avoid hardship on students who are observing religious holidays on days when school is in session, unless directed by state or other authority beyond the control of the School Board.
 2. In no case shall individual classroom, school-wide or district-wide, tests be administered on religious holidays on which the people of a faith are expected to attend their place of worship.
 3. A student who has an authorized absence due to a religious holiday shall be permitted to make up work.
- III. Religious symbols and objects – religious symbols or objects shall not be displayed in the public schools, except for educational and academic purposes. This may be interpreted to mean that they may be used as an integral part of a study in the curriculum as described in (1) above, but only during the actual teaching and shall be removed from display at the end of the lesson.
 - A. Religious symbols and object are defined as items that are directly related to and a part of a particular religion and which are not otherwise accepted generally as culturally representative of a season.

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- B. Questions shall be directed to a principal or to the superintendent if the use of any symbol or object is in doubt.
- IV. Music and art – any music or art which has instructional value may be used in classroom and extracurricular activities provided that the central purpose is secular instruction and appreciation of the music or art.
- A. The use of art, drama or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves a sound educational goal in the curriculum but not if used as a vehicle for promoting religious belief.
 - B. School concerts that present a variety of selections may include religious music. Concerts should avoid programs dominated by religious music, especially when these coincide with a particular religious holiday.
 - C. No student may be required to participate in any part of a program to which he objects for reasons of religion, and no student shall be penalized for such non-participation.
- V. Celebrations, programs, and assemblies – all celebrations, programs, movies, and assemblies must have secular and educational purposes and effects.
- A. No such event may have a purpose or effect that reasonably can be expected and judged to be religious.
 - B. Parties held to celebrate a religious holiday are not permitted, provided, however, that traditional seasonal parties may be held.
 - C. Ceremonies, programs, celebrations, and assemblies school-wide or in individual classrooms may include a recognition of the cultural and social importance of religion.
 - D. Invocations and benedictions must be ecumenical. It is expected that invocations and benedictions will be limited to formal group activities other than individual classroom activities.
 - E. Such activities may not include religious worship; sectarian literature may not be distributed; and promotions of religious events, even when non-school related, are not permitted.
 - F. Guests of the school, including participants in assemblies and other convocations, should be instructed in these regulations by the principal or designee in advance of the guests' appearance.

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- VI. Prayer, Bible reading and silent meditation – the reading of the Bible and recitation of prayer as part of compulsory opening exercises may not be held in the Sarasota public school system. This is not to prohibit a brief period daily for silent meditation on the part of students, in accordance with F.S. 1003.45 (3). The principal of each public school shall require teachers in first-period classrooms in all grades to set aside at least 1 minute, but not more than 2 minutes, daily for a moment of silence, during which students may not interfere with other students' participation. A teacher may not make suggestions as to the nature of any reflection that a student may engage in during the moment of silence.-
- VII. Use of school facilities – school facilities may be used by religious groups during non-school hours. Such use shall be requested, considered and implemented in accordance with existing School Board policy 9.30 governing the use of facilities by any outside organization.
- VIII. Released time for religious instruction – students may be released during the regular school day for religious instruction provided that:
- A. The instruction takes place off of public school premises;
 - B. The parents or legal guardians request the release in writing, including a statement of acceptance of responsibility for the student from the time of dismissal and departure from the campus, and specifying the person or institution to which the student may be released;
 - C. The parents or legal guardians assume all responsibility, in writing, for the transportation of the student at all times during released time from the school campus, and
 - D. The time away from school will not interfere with the regular school instruction.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

1001.41(2), F.S.

LAWS IMPLEMENTED:

1003.21(2)(b)(1), 1003.45(1), F.S.

1002.20(2)(c), 1002.206,

HISTORY:

Adopted: 05/07/02
Revision Date(s): 04/02/19
Formerly: 2.133

NOTES: