

POLICY RELATING TO EDUCATION

CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

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

The Wachusett Regional School Committee, 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, establishes the following guidelines:

1. The observance of religious holidays will not be the responsibility of the public schools.
2. 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 not to advocate for the religious aspects of such holidays.
3. 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 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, an individual student chooses to use a religious personage, event, or symbol as the vehicle for an artistic expression, the individual student should be allowed to take this action.
4. The District shall recognize the responsibility of the family unit to address the religious needs of its members. In order to reinforce the family's values and to avoid isolation and discrimination against students, the District shall accommodate established religious calendar holidays by ensuring that examinations and special activities are scheduled so as not to interfere with those established religious holidays.

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CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES (continued)

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 the people in a pluralistic society.

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