

SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES

The Board of Education of the Berlin Central School District recognizes the value of certain ceremonies and observances in promoting love of country and good citizenship among the students. The Board therefore encourages activities in the Berlin Central Schools that commemorate national holidays.

The Board remains impartial with regard to religion. It seeks neither to advance nor to inhibit religion. Students, faculty, and administration must be always mindful of the diversity of religious beliefs to be found in this community and in this nation, and must therefore, in order to ensure civility among those who hold different views and beliefs, be conscious of and respect the sensitivities of others.

The Board recognizes nonetheless that activities related to the celebration of religious holidays may present an excellent opportunity to teach about religion and to foster respect and understanding among students. The Board further recognizes that educational goals that are motivated by secular purposes cannot always eliminate religious aspects, and may sometimes require the presentation of material with religious themes.

Activities related to the observance of religious holidays will be permitted only to the extent that appropriate educational goals are fostered. Such activities shall be conducted in a manner that is unbiased and objective, focusing on the historical origins of the holiday, its history, and the generally agreed upon meaning of the holiday observance.

In planning activities related to a religious holiday or theme, special effort shall be made by instructional and administrative staff to ensure that the activity is in no way devotional, and also that students of all faiths or no faith can join without feeling that they are betraying their own beliefs.

Therefore:

1. school and class plays shall not be overtly religious;
2. religious music shall not predominate in the music that is performed or presented; and
3. program notes, illustrations, and decorations shall not be religious or sectarian.

The display of religious objects or symbols is prohibited except to the extent that such display is used as a teaching aid or resource and to provide examples of cultural or religious heritage within the context of a short-term study in the curriculum, such as world religions, art, or history. Symbols that are secular and seasonal in nature, such as Santa Claus or Easter Bunnies, can be displayed in a seasonal context without reference to religion.

Upon request of a person in parental relation, a student may be excused from taking part in those programs or parts of programs or the curriculum involving a religious theme that conflicts with the student's own religious beliefs.

References

Lee v. Weismann, 505 US ____ (1992)

County of Allegheny v. Amer. Civil Liberties Union, 492 US 573 (1989)

Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 US 668 (1984)

Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 US 602 (1971)