

The United States Constitution and the Wisconsin Constitution, as well as federal and state laws and related court rulings, clearly establish the concept of "the separation of church and state" and the "preclusion of sectarian instruction in public schools."

In order to help staff members abide by the law, and to avoid compromising any student's religious or conscientious beliefs or freedoms, the School District of Altoona has established the following guidelines:

- The observance of religious holidays is not the responsibility of the public schools.
- Since a public school is not a place of worship, the instructional materials, activities, decorations, or assembly programs that are introduced into the school should not promote any religion.
- While it is recognized that, with the approach of major holidays, many activities are initiated 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.

Music programs, especially those given at times close to religious holidays, may use religious music, though a specific religion should not be the underlying theme of the program nor should the music be used for religious promotion or persuasion. 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, though they may convey general core values and character 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. However, if individual students choose to use a religious personage, event, or symbol as the vehicle for an artistic expression, they should be allowed to take this action.

The above statements should not be interpreted to preclude the factual and objective teaching about religions, religious holidays, and religious differences. Such instruction is an important part in learning about history, literature, and cultures. It may be taught as part of the District curriculum, provided that the teaching does not promote or infringe upon the religious beliefs of students, does not show preference for one religion over another, and does not violate federal or state laws.

The right of the student to participate fully in curricular, co-curricular, student services, recreational or other ceremonies, activities or opportunities shall not be abridged or impaired because of a student's sex, race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, physical, mental, emotional or learning disability/handicap.

Legal Ref: 115.28(2), 115.28(31), 118.13 Wisc. Statutes  
United States Constitution  
Wisconsin State Constitution: Article I, Section 18 Article X, Section 3

Cross Ref: Policy 311 Academic Freedom and Controversial Issues,  
Policy 333 Parent Rights in Relation to District Programs/Activities and Student Privacy

ADOPTED: 11/21/16