



SCHOOL CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY

Policy

The Torrington Board of Education directs that the administration shall provide for students and teachers the opportunity to observe an appropriate period of time for silent meditation at the beginning of each school day, to provide an opportunity to say the Pledge of Allegiance, and to regulate appropriate display of the flag and the appropriate observation of religious ceremonies and holidays. It is the policy of the Board of Education to not prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in the district's schools, consistent with current guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Administrative Regulations

1. Time shall be provided daily, preferably during the morning opening exercises, to provide the opportunity for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Permissive language rather than mandatory language, shall be used to introduce the recitation of the Pledge, such as, "You may now stand to recite the Pledge, or, You are invited to participate in the recitation of the Pledge.
3. **Religious Ceremonies** – The Supreme Court of the United States in two significant decisions declared it illegal to hold formal, prescribed religious exercises in the public schools. [Engel decision on state-adopted prayer (1962) and the Schempp decision on bible reading (1963)]. However, while the court's prohibitions are narrow, its permissions are broad. Accordingly, the following types of school activities are permitted so long as they do not take on the character of religious devotions:
 - a. Writing or analyzing literature on religious subjects
 - b. Playing, singing and presentation of music which is religious in its inspiration or origin
 - c. Performance of drama which deals with religious history or which is religious in its content
 - d. Production or exhibition of art work dealing with religious themes

4. **United States Flag** – The flag of the United States of America shall be raised above each schoolhouse and at other appropriate places during all school sessions, weather permitting, and on the inside of the schoolhouse on other school days. The Flag shall be raised before the opening of the school and taken down at its close every day.
5. The United States Flag shall be displayed in each schoolroom each day school is in session.
6. **Holidays and Special Events** – Holidays and special events may be recognized in our schools within the mores of our culture so long as such recognition respects the rights and feelings of minorities and is consistent with the law.
7. Songs and customs which have come to us from the various ethnic and racial segments of our population may be used so as to broaden the awareness of our students to the contributions which each such segment has made to the composite American culture.
8. **Jewish Holy Days** – The Principal is responsible for making sure that teachers refrain from administering tests and quizzes when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur fall on school days. If possible, major school functions should not be scheduled for Friday evenings prior to Jewish holy days. Students of the Jewish faith will be excused without penalty on Jewish holy days.
9. **Recognition of Religious Holidays** – Recognition of religious holidays must be a secular education experience directed solely to enhancing tolerance of and respect for religious diversity and must be developmentally and age-appropriate, accurate in content, and objective in presentation.
10. **Separation of Church and State- Federally Required Guidelines** – Students have the following rights pursuant to federal law:
 - a. To engage in private, non-disruptive activity such as prayer or bible reading while at school;
 - b. To participate in before or after school events that have a religious content;
 - c. To study about religion when appropriate to the curriculum;
 - d. To produce written expressions of religious beliefs in homework, art work, and other assignments;
 - e. To distribute religious material in a non-disruptive manner, subject to reasonable restrictions as to time, place, and manner;
 - f. To be excused for religious reasons from participation in school programs or activities;
 - g. To be granted release time to attend religious events;
 - h. To wear clothing that includes a non disruptive religious theme or message;

- i. To be given access to school media to announce religious events in the same manner as other organizations;
- j. To be granted access to school facilities for religious activities in the same manner as other organizations.

Legal Reference:

Connecticut General Statutes

10-16a Silent meditation

10-29a Certain days to be proclaimed by governor. Distribution and number of proclamations

10-230 Flags for schoolrooms and schools

PA 02-119, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance

No Child Left Behind Act

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