

Policy

Egg Harbor Township Board of Education

2270 RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

The Board of Education recognizes that religious belief and disbelief are matters of personal conviction rather than governmental authority and the students of this district are protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and by Article I, Paragraph 4 of the New Jersey State Constitution from the establishment of religion in the schools. The First Amendment requires public school officials to show neither favoritism toward nor hostility against religious expression.

The Board of Education recognizes the acknowledgment of religious holidays in the public school may be a source of community concern. It is a goal of the district educational program to teach mutual understanding and brotherhood and respect for group differences. In pursuing this goal, the educational program may recognize that various religious groups celebrate different holidays with different practices. The Board of Education recognizes the New Jersey Department of Education approved religious holidays permitting pupil absence from school consistent with the Egg Harbor Township School District Handbook and law.

The Board believes that an understanding of religions and the contributions that religion has made to the advancement of civilization is essential to the thorough education of young people and to their appreciation of a pluralistic society. To that end, the curriculum may be developed to include, as appropriate to the various ages and attainments of the students, instruction about the religions of the world.

The Board also acknowledges the degree to which a religious consciousness has enriched the arts, literature, music, and issues of morality. The instructional and resource materials approved for use in the schools of this district frequently contain religious references or concern moral issues that have traditionally been the focus of religious concern. That such materials may, therefore, be religious in nature shall not, by itself, bar their use by the district. The Board directs that teaching staff members employing such materials be neutral in their approach and avoid using them to advance or inhibit religion in any way.

The Board recognizes that religious traditions vary in their perceptions and doctrines regarding the natural world and its processes. The curriculum is chosen for its place in the thorough and efficient education of the children of this district, not for its conformity to religious principles. Students should receive unbiased instruction in the schools so that they may privately accept or reject the knowledge so gained in accordance with their own religious tenets.

The Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 4071, is designed to ensure that student religious activities are afforded the same access to Federally funded public secondary school facilities as are student secular activities. The United States Department of Justice has developed guidance for interpreting the Equal Access Act's requirements which is outlined in the USDOE Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary

and Secondary Schools which provides information on the current state of the law concerning religious expression in public schools.

U.S. Const. Amend. 1

The Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 4071

U.S. Department of Education - Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools – January 16, 2020

N.J. Const. (1947) Art. 1, para. 4

N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.6 et seq.; 18A:36-16

Adopted: 10/22/2002

Revised: 11/25/2003, 05/10/2016, 04/26/2022