

Hopkinton Public Schools Religious Holiday Observance and Religious Expression Policy

The Hopkinton Public Schools are committed to respecting cultural and religious diversity.

The Hopkinton School Committee has issued this policy in an attempt to balance that commitment with its recognition that the celebration of religious holidays is a personal matter and is better undertaken by parents, houses of worship, and religious day schools.

In schools it is permissible to teach about religion in the context of history, literature, art, music, or other core subjects. Religious traditions, including holidays, provide an excellent opportunity for learning about different cultures and allow for fostering understanding and tolerance of diversity for our students who live in a pluralistic society. The tone and spirit of school activities must respect the many religious differences in the school population, neither promoting any particular religion nor inhibiting a child's right to his or her own religion. Students of all religious backgrounds (or no religion) should feel that the schools respect their beliefs.

Guidelines:

1. **Excused Absences** - The Hopkinton Schools will allow excused absences to celebrate religious holidays and students and staff will not be penalized for such absences.
2. **Homework/Assignments** – A student's observance of a religious holiday may have an impact on work that is due. The student is expected to complete short-term work assigned around a religious holiday, including any tests or quizzes that were scheduled for days missed because of religious holiday observance, at a mutually agreed-upon date.
3. **Sports and Extra-curricular Activities** – Students shall not be penalized because they are unable to participate in a sporting event or practice or in another extra-curricular activity due to their observance of a religious holiday.
4. **Celebrating** – Teachers must be alert to the distinction between teaching about religious holidays, which is permissible within the context of curriculum, and celebrating religious holidays, which is not. Recognition of and information about holidays can focus on how and when they are celebrated, their origins, histories, and traditions. During the course of each school year, it is important that a balance be maintained in teaching about the holidays of various religions and cultures.
5. **Religious Symbols** – As part of their teaching about religious holidays and the role religion plays in history, literature, culture, and the arts, teachers may display

religious symbols and displays associated with religious holidays as **teaching aids or resources** only during the period of instruction. These religious symbols or religious holiday displays are not permitted in public spaces such as hallways, cafeteria, or common space and no such symbol or display may be visible from outside the school facility. No religious symbols, including those related to holidays, should be represented on teacher generated papers and materials unless these materials directly relate to curricular study about the religion or culture.

6. **Freedom of Expression** – Students’ personal expression of religious beliefs, protected by the First Amendment, are appropriate and encouraged. In completing an assignment, a student may chose to include religious statements or symbols and these works may be displayed in ways consistent with any other student-generated work. Homework, art work, and written and oral assignments that express a student’s religious beliefs should be judged by ordinary academic standards and relevance.

In addition, despite everyone’s best efforts, there may be times when a student or his or her parent feels the need for the student to be excused from a particular activity that is objectionable on the basis of religion or personal belief or practice. The District will excuse such student without causing embarrassment or penalty to the student.

7. **Music** – Student music performances may contain pieces chosen for their musical content and representing a variety of religious and cultural traditions. Religious music may be part of but not dominate such concerts. Decisions about musical selections are curricular decisions to be made by the Music Department, subject to approval of the building principal.

Implementation:

The Superintendent is responsible for the implementation of this policy and shall establish and enforce procedures to ensure all staff, students, and parents are aware of the policy and are able to raise concerns about the policy and its implementation.

Hopkinton School Committee
Hopkinton, Massachusetts

Policy Adopted: 5/17/01