INSTRUCTION

Holiday Activities

The purpose of this regulation is to assist principals and teachers in making sound decisions about the types of holiday activities they will use in their schools.

Prince William County Public Schools recognizes the diversity in American society. Our curriculum includes teaching students to respect different religious beliefs, convictions, and practices. All schools are encouraged and expected to develop a climate in which every student can feel comfortable with educational activities containing material about religion, culture, and heritage which may or may not be their own.

The purpose of holiday activities is to further the education and enrichment of students and increase respect, tolerance, and understanding without causing students of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds to feel excluded and without violating constitutional rights of religious freedom or the establishment clause. Thus, through the use of a variety of holiday activities representing different cultures, faiths, and traditions, teachers and administrators are expected to avoid the appearance of sponsoring a religion or cultural tradition over another.

Holiday activities are an appropriate and interesting way to teach students about religion, culture, and history. Special songs, art projects, drama presentations, and classroom activities help students enjoy learning about various holidays that have national, sacred, or historic value and the significance of these holidays to others. Educators have a professional responsibility to ensure that the focus of art projects, music for concerts, drama presentations, classroom activities, or social events is on education and may include historical, cultural, and religious content when these elements are incorporated as a way to support the instructional goals of the curriculum.

The appropriateness and suitability of any holiday activity depends on its purpose and context. Teachers and principals should seek activities that are instructionally relevant, have been thoughtfully chosen, and are representative of the pluralism of our country. Therefore, teachers and principals throughout Prince William County Public Schools must:

1. Determine how holiday activities will further the education and enrichment of students by connecting them to objectives in the curriculum.

2. Determine which holiday activities can best help them meet their educational goals.
3. Determine how holiday activities can be of cultural, historical, and religious significance without presenting a distorted picture of the faiths or beliefs of a religion.

4. Determine how students and staff who do not wish to participate in specific holiday activities due to their religious beliefs can be accommodated.

The following guidelines have been found to be constitutional by a federal appeals court and should serve to guide teachers and principals in planning and implementing holiday activities that are a part of religious holidays.

1. Holidays throughout the year which have a religious and a secular basis may be observed in public schools.

2. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of religious holidays may be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination.

3. Music, art, literature, and drama having religious themes or basis are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday. Presentations should represent a variety of cultures and religious heritages and should not be exclusive to one religious tradition.

4. The use of religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, creche, symbols of Native American religions or other symbols that are a part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided such symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature. Religious symbols should be used as an educational resource or teaching tool necessary to the activity. Displays of different religions and cultures should be of a similar size, proportion, and position to avoid giving the appearance of advocating one religion or culture over another.

The school district’s calendar should be prepared so as to minimize conflicts with religious holidays of all faiths and should conform to the requirements of Regulation 261-2.
This rule applies to extracurricular activities as well as curricular activities. Special care should be taken with religious calendars which do not match the 365-day civil calendar, such as the Muslim and Jewish calendars, and which may have religious holidays that begin the evening prior to the first day of the holiday.

The Principal and Appropriate Level Associate Superintendent (or designee) are responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

The Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability (or designee) is responsible for reviewing and revising this regulation in 2018.