



AAPS HOLIDAY GUIDELINES

Following is a comprehensive review about current accepted practice of holiday observances in the public school. It was adapted from *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools** by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas.

Please keep in mind the following local guidelines at the

elementary level:

- Parties should not exceed an hour and one half at the elementary level.
- If students are excluded or choose not to participate they must have appropriate work and supervision.
- The activities should serve the academic goals of the course and school.
- Board policy 4117 – As employees of the district, individuals shall not accept gifts of more than token value from students or their parents or guardians or from vendors or businesses. (Exception: gifts to a retiring or reassigned employee.)

Administrators will communicate this information to all employees, student teachers, students and parents during September of each school year and again in the first week of December of each school year. (Policy adopted: December 9, 1987)

secondary level:

- **Any** movies shown should be the correct rating for the age group of the student audience and should only be viewed with parental permission.
- Parties should not exceed one class period at secondary level.
- If students are excluded or choose not to participate they must have appropriate work and supervision.
- The activities should serve the academic goals of the course and school.
- Board policy 4117 – As employees of the district, individuals shall not accept gifts of more than token value from students or their parents or guardians or from vendors or businesses. (Exception: gifts to a retiring or reassigned employee.)

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Tips for Planning around Religious Holidays

1. Any teacher or administrator should ask her/himself the following questions as s/he plans holiday activities:
 - How does this activity serve the academic goals of the course, or the educational mission of the school? Do I have a distinct educational purpose in mind? If so, what is it? It should not be the purpose of public schools to celebrate or observe religious holidays.
 - Are we prepared to teach about the religious meaning of this holiday in a way that enriches students' understanding of history and cultures?
 - If I use holidays as an opportunity to teach about religion, am I balanced and fair in my approach? If in December: Do we plan activities to teach about religious holidays at various time of the year or only in December? If I teach about Christmas and Easter, do I also teach about non-Christian holidays? Ask: Would this activity/event be equally appropriate in January, April, or September?

- Does the planned activity have the primary effect of promoting or inhibiting religion? Does it, for example, promote one faith over another or even religion in general? Remember that the school's approach should be academic, not devotional, to teach about, not to preach. It is never appropriate for public schools to proselytize.
 - Will any student or parent be made to feel like an outsider, not a full member of the community, by this activity?
2. A common misconception is that it is permissible to promote Christianity at Christmas, provided that other religions receive similar treatment at other times. For example, some teachers may try to justify celebrating Christmas by celebrating Hanukkah. This approach is wrong. First, Hanukkah is not a major Jewish holiday and should not be equated with Christmas, one of the two most important holidays in the Christian year. Instead of "balancing" Christmas with Hanukkah, teachers should work to ensure that all holiday activities focus on objective study about religion, not indoctrination, and are not unduly influenced by seasonal/commercial symbolism.
 3. Symbols of a holiday may be displayed at an employee's individual work space, as long as they are of a secular (e.g. Christmas tree, Santa, wreath, dreidel), not of a religious (e.g. crèche, angel, menorah) nature. However, employees are encouraged to be sensitive to the beliefs and non-beliefs of those who work in proximity to them and of the clients/students/families/community members with whom they come in contact.