

**GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
Greenwich, Connecticut

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**Policy E-001 - PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND CURRICULUM**

**Procedure E-001.1 - CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES**

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**1. United States Flag**

The flag of the United States of America shall be displayed in each classroom and raised above each schoolhouse and at other appropriate places during all school sessions, weather permitting. The flag shall be raised before the opening of school and taken down at its close every day.

Flags at all schools and buildings administered by the Board of Education shall be displayed at half-staff as directed by the chief executive officer of the Town of Greenwich.

**2. Opening Exercises**

The morning opening exercises shall include the following:

- a. An opportunity at the start of each school day to allow those students and teachers who wish to do so to observe this time in silent meditation.
- b. An opportunity each school day for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Students may decline to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and may refrain from saluting the flag. A student who chooses not to participate may remain seated during the flag salute.

The morning opening exercises may also include activities such as one or a combination of the following:

- a. Patriotic song (participation is voluntary)

- b. Reading
- c. Music
- d. Student speakers
- e. News reports
- f. Sharing experiences
- g. Announcements
- h. Planning the day's work
- i. Appropriate activities for special days
- j. Assignment of duties

### **3. Religious Ceremonies**

Decisions of the United States Supreme Court have established the principle that public schools shall be religiously neutral and any practices must:

- Have a secular purpose
- Have a primary effect which neither advances nor inhibits religion
- Avoid excessive government entanglement with religion

### **4. Prayer in Public Schools**

Vocal, denominational or non-denominational prayer and ceremonial reading from sacred texts, such as the old and new testaments of the Bible and the Koran, are unconstitutional practices in public schools. Prayers delivered by clergy at official public school graduation ceremonies are unconstitutional. School officials, employees or outsiders may not deliver prayers at school assemblies. Student volunteers may not deliver prayers at school assemblies, even if the assemblies are voluntary.

It is unconstitutional for teachers to pray with or in the presence of their students in school, or in their capacity as a teacher or representative of the school.

A student may engage in private prayer or other religious activities, including engaging other students in religious discussion, as long as that private religious activity does not materially disrupt the school's educational mission and activities. Personal religious activity may not interfere with the rights and well-being of other students.

### **5. Religion in the Curriculum**

Religion may be presented as part of a secular educational program, with the goal of teaching students about the role of religion in the historical, cultural, economic and social development of the United States and other nations, and instilling understanding, tolerance and a respect for a pluralistic society. Religion must be discussed in a neutral, objective balanced and factual manner.

The study of religion may naturally occur within the context of studying other topics. The curriculum's approach may not be devotional or doctrinal nor have the effect of promoting or inhibiting religion. Sacred texts, such as the old and new testaments of the Bible and the Koran, may be studied as literature, but not as religious doctrine. The lesson must be secular, religiously neutral and objective.

If religion is discussed, care must be taken to include minority as well as majority religions. Any discussion of religion in the classroom should be very sensitive to the beliefs of different students in the class. In no event should any student feel that his/her own beliefs or practices are being questioned, infringed upon or compromised.

Students may be excused from a class or program due to the conflicting religious beliefs of the students or their parents. A written request from a parent or guardian is required.

Religious symbols such as crosses, crèches and menorahs, may be used as teaching aids in the classroom provided the symbols are displayed as an example of the cultural and religious heritage of the holiday, and are temporary in nature. They may not be used as decorations. Symbols of religious holidays which have acquired secular meaning, such as Christmas trees, may be permissible decorations. Students may be excused from classes if the religious beliefs of the students or their parents conflict with the content of a classroom activity. A written request from a parent or guardian will be required.

Music, art, literature and drama with religious themes may be included in teaching about holidays, provided they are presented in a religiously neutral, prudent and objective manner, and relate to sound, secular educational goals. Religious music or drama may be included in school events such as assemblies, concerts and programs so long as the programs are objective and educational and do not focus on any one religion or religious observance. Student participation should be voluntary.

## **6. Religious Holidays**

Observing religious holidays in the form of religious worship or other practices is unconstitutional. Teaching about the historical, contemporary and cultural aspects of holidays with both a religious and secular basis may be constitutional if it furthers a genuine secular program of education, is presented objectively and does not have the effect of advancing or inhibiting religion. The study of religious holidays should reflect this nation's diversity.

## **7. Religious Clubs**

Access to school facilities and services is covered under district procedure.....

## **8. Distribution of Materials**

Distribution of materials is addressed in district procedure.....

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes  
10-16a Silent meditation  
10-29a Certain days due to proclamation by governor. Distribution  
and number of proclamations.  
10-230 Flags for schoolrooms and school  
10-230b (amended)  
(cf. United States Supreme Court, the Engel decision on state  
adopted prayer, 1962, and the Schempp decision on Bible reading,  
(1963)  
(cf. United States Supreme Court, Lee v. Weisman, 112 S.Ct.2649  
(1992)  
(cf. Board of Education of Westside Community Schools v.  
Mergens, 496 U.S.226(1990)

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