

**Yolo County Office of Education
Board Policy and Superintendent's Policy
BP/SP 6141.2
Instruction**

RECOGNITION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

The Yolo County Office of Education and the Yolo County Board of Education recognize that students' education would be incomplete without an understanding of the role of religion in society. As appropriate for a particular course, teachers may objectively discuss the influences of various religions, using religious works and symbols to illustrate their relationship with culture, literature or the arts. The County Office expects that such instruction will identify principles common to all religions and foster respect for the diversity of religions and customs in the world.

In order to respect each student's individual right to freedom of religious practice, religious indoctrination is forbidden in public schools. Instruction about religion may not promote or denigrate the beliefs or customs of any particular religion or sect, show a preference for one religious viewpoint over another, or interfere with the religious development of any student in whatever tradition the student embraces. Additionally, instruction about religion shall treat all religions and religious convictions, including nonbelief, with fairness and respect.

There shall be no endorsement, encouragement or solicitation of religious or anti-religious expression or activities among students during class time.

There shall be no coercion of students in prayer or other religious activities as part of official duties. However, there is no prohibition, when acting in a private capacity, against encouraging students' participation in personal prayer or other religious activity. Additionally, there shall be no prohibition against or discouragement of any student from praying or otherwise expressing the student's religious belief so long as this does not disrupt the classroom or other county office of education (COE)-sponsored activity.

Students may express their beliefs about religion in their homework, artwork and other class work if the expression is germane to the assignment. Such work shall be judged by ordinary academic standards, relevance, and other legitimate pedagogical objectives.

While teaching about religious holidays is a permissible part of the educational program, celebrating religious holidays is not allowed. COE-sponsored programs shall not be, nor have the effect of being, religiously oriented or a religious celebration. School and classroom decorations may express seasonal themes that are not religious in nature. The use of religious symbols that are part of a religious holiday is permitted as a teaching aid or resource provided that such symbols are displayed as an example of cultural and religious heritage of the holiday and are temporary in nature.

Classroom methods in instruction about religion shall not include religious role-playing activities or simulated religious devotional acts. Music, art, literature or drama programs having religious themes are permitted as part of the curriculum for COE-sponsored activities and programs if presented in an objective manner and as a traditional part of cultural and religious heritage.

COE schools shall not prohibit religious activities if the same or similar non-religious activities are permitted.

When required by law, parents/guardians shall be notified that they may, via written request, opt their students out of instruction on the basis of their religious beliefs. Students whose parents/guardians opt them out of such instruction may be offered an alternative activity of similar educational value. Additionally, a student shall not be subject to disciplinary action, academic penalty, or other sanction on the grounds that the student was opted out of such instruction.

Policy Reference Disclaimer:

These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.

State	Description
Ed. Code 38130-38139	Civic Center Act
Ed. Code 46014	Absences for religious purposes
Ed. Code 51240	Excuse from instruction due to religious beliefs
Ed. Code 51511	Religious matters properly included in courses of study
Ed. Code 51930-51939	California Healthy Youth Act

Federal	Description
20 USC 4071-4074	Equal Access Act
20 USC 6061	School prayer
20 USC 7904	School prayer

Management Resources	Description
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California Department of Education Publication	Appendix F history social science framework for California public schools
Court Decision	Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971) 403 U.S. 602
Court Decision	Lassonde v. Pleasanton Unified School District (2003, 9th Cir.) 320 F.3d 979
Court Decision	Cole v. Oroville Union High School District (2000, 9th Cir.) 228 F.3d 1092
Court Decision	Kennedy v. Bremerton (2022) 142 S.Ct. 2407
Court Decision	Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified School District Board of Education (2023) 82 F.4th 664
Court Decision	Florey v. Sioux Falls (1980) 619 F.2d 1311
Court Decision	Mahmoud v. Taylor (2025) 606 U.S. ____ (2025 WL 1773627)
U.S. Department of Education Publication	<u>Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, May 2023</u>
Website	<u>CSBA District and County Office of Education Legal Services</u>
Website	<u>U.S. Department of Education</u>
Website	<u>CSBA</u>
Website	<u>California Department of Education</u>

Cross References

Code	Description
0410	<u>Nondiscrimination In County Office Programs And Activities</u>
0450	<u>Comprehensive Safety Plan</u>

0450	<u>Comprehensive Safety Plan</u>
1330	<u>Use Of County Office Facilities</u>
1330	<u>Use Of County Office Facilities</u>
5020	<u>Parent Rights And Responsibilities</u>
5020	<u>Parent Rights And Responsibilities</u>
5113	<u>Absences And Excuses</u>
5113	<u>Absences And Excuses</u>
5138	<u>Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation</u>
5145.2	<u>Freedom Of Speech/Expression</u>
5145.2	<u>Freedom Of Speech/Expression</u>
6115	<u>Ceremonies And Observances</u>
6115	<u>Ceremonies And Observances</u>
6142.8	<u>Comprehensive Health Education</u>
6142.8	<u>Comprehensive Health Education</u>
6142.93	<u>Science Instruction</u>
6142.94	<u>History-Social Science Instruction</u>
6143	<u>Courses Of Study</u>
6143	<u>Courses Of Study</u>
6144	<u>Controversial Issues</u>
6145.5	<u>Student Organizations And Equal Access</u>
6145.5	<u>Student Organizations And Equal Access</u>
6145.8	<u>Assemblies And Special Events</u>
6154	<u>Homework/Makeup Work</u>
6161.11	<u>Supplementary Instructional Materials</u>
6163.1	<u>Library Media Centers</u>

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YOLO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
Woodland, California