



**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
BULLETIN**

TITLE: Holiday Displays and Programs

NUMBER: BUL-6204.2

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ROUTING
All Employees
All Locations

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Bulletin is to update and clarify procedures for holiday displays and programs at schools, District offices, and worksites.

MAJOR CHANGES: This Bulletin replaces BUL-6204.1, “Holiday Displays and Programs”, dated December 7, 2015, issued by the Office of the Superintendent, and reflects recent organizational changes.

BACKGROUND: This Bulletin provides guidelines regarding holiday displays and programs. Respect for humankind is increased by recognizing and understanding the beliefs, values, and customs of others. School programs designed to improve comprehension and acceptance of differences have educational significance. This Bulletin provides information for administrators and personnel who will be preparing holiday displays and planning holiday programs. With regards to religious matters in public school settings, section 51511 of the California Education Code provides, as follows:

“Nothing in this code shall be construed to prevent, or exclude from the public schools, references to religion or references to or the use of religious literature, dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, or other things having a religious significance when such references or uses do not constitute instruction in religious principles or aid to any religious sect, church, creed, or sectarian purpose and when such references or uses are incidental to or illustrative of matters properly included in the course of study.”

GUIDELINES: The following guidelines apply:

- I. The demographics of the District emphasize the need to provide inclusive education and information about the rich cultural traditions and heritage of the many groups that are represented in our communities. Care needs to be exercised in developing the content of these programs to respect diversity and the separation of church and state in a prudent and objective manner, and to ensure that sectarian doctrine is avoided. A multitude of faiths and beliefs are



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represented within the District. There is no expectation that students and staff be shielded from content that differs from their own faith or belief.

Guidelines for holiday displays are applicable to schools, District offices, and worksites. Displays that include holiday symbols such as Christmas trees or menorahs would not be a violation of federal or state law. A program that includes a song that references religion among other holiday or seasonal musical selections, would similarly not violate law.

The court recognizes Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and menorahs as relevant to holidays that have a secular, as well as religious significance, and has upheld their decorative usage, as long as they neither advance nor inhibit religion. Nevertheless, schools, offices, and worksites are encouraged to exercise sensitivity and inclusion so that all students and staff feel welcome in their school community or work location.

II. Administrative, Multicultural, and Curricular Implications

- A. Students benefit from programs that increase awareness of the variety of beliefs in a pluralistic society and that teach mutual understanding, fellowship, and respect for group differences. They also benefit from programs that increase their awareness of how holidays are observed by different cultures and nationalities. Emphasis should be placed on cultural learning.
- B. Staff members, advisory councils, members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), leadership councils, and other appropriate advisory personnel should participate in planning and developing holiday programs that reflect respect for the sensibilities of staff and students of all faiths. Programs should be consistent with the policies of the Board of Education and the laws of the State of California.
- C. Holiday programs require careful planning so that no student or staff member will be prevented from participation, nor compelled to participate. At all times, students and staff must be provided the privilege of excuse from participation in any holiday program because of firmly held personal convictions without penalty, bias, or retaliation.
- D. The quality of content and the length of time spent in the preparation and presentation of any program must be educationally justifiable. Programs prepared under the jurisdiction of the school are a part of the curriculum, and administrators are expected to assess and supervise the educational value of all programs that are developed.



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- E. Sectarian scenes, displays, and tableaux whose purpose is to create a religious tone or sacred atmosphere are not to be included.
- F. Religious exhibits, displays, or symbols such as crosses, crèches, and menorahs may be used when they are a necessary and integral part of the study of subjects in the curriculum, such as art or history. However, such exhibits, displays, and symbols may not be used as decorations unless they are part of a display that includes other holiday symbols.
- G. The District Memorandum on the "Calendar of Commemorative Dates and Observances" is issued annually and offers opportunities for a variety of school programs. Some of these include recognition of persons who made significant contributions to American life, events that influenced development as a nation, and activities that highlight cultural and religious heritages.

AUTHORITY: United States Constitution, First and Fourteenth Amendments
California Education Code, section 51511
County of Allegheny v. Greater Pittsburgh ACLU (1989) 492 U.S. 573
Okrand v. City of Los Angeles (1989) 207 Cal App. 3d 566
School Dist. of Abington Township, Pa. v. Schempp, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)
Floreay v. Sioux Falls School Dist., 619 F. 2d 1311 (8th Cir. 1980)

RELATED RESOURCES: BUL-5479.2, "Guidelines for Teaching About Religions," dated April 11, 2016, issued by the Office of the Superintendent.

Memorandum on the Calendar of Commemorative Dates and Observances, issued annually

ASSISTANCE: For assistance, please contact your Local District Operations Coordinator. For further information, please call the Division of District Operations at (213) 241-5337.