



Responding to religious *bias* in your school

Schools may teach about religion, but may not practice any religion

Religious neutrality

The principle that public schools must be “religiously neutral” has been well established by decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States. California further supports this principle by prohibiting curriculum that reflects adversely on persons because of their religion. If your state has not legislated such a safeguard, doing so should be a legislative priority.

Three important questions that can indicate religious neutrality or bias*

- A.** Will any student or parent be made to feel like an outsider, not a full member of the school or classroom community by this activity or assignment?
- B.** Is this activity consistent with the stated academic goals of the course of study, or included only to recognize a religious holiday?
- C.** Is the curriculum fair and balanced, including various religious traditions?

*Based on the California Three R’s Project

Involved parents are effective advocates!

- ✓ *Join the PTA or a committee*
- ✓ *Have regular contact with teachers*
- ✓ *Read your student’s instructional materials*

If you have a concern

1. Gather the facts and keep a written record of events and dates relating to the problem.
2. Try to determine if the problem is lack of information or bias.

Begin with the assumption that the problem was not intentional and take a friendly approach.

- ✓ *You can always express stronger feelings in the future*
- ✓ *You won’t be able to take back a threat or angry comment once it has been made*

3. Call JCRC for resources and guidance on content and/or process.
4. Understand your state and local guidelines and policies. JCRC can help.
5. Join together with other parents; several voices have more credibility than one unhappy parent.
6. Try to resolve the problem from the level closest to the student: first teacher, then principal, then superintendent, then school board. Maintain contact with teacher even if the issue escalates.
7. Keep your contact at JCRC informed about what is happening and expected future developments.

The Jewish community is committed to preserving the principles of religious freedom and separation of religion and state embodied by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. For many years, **JCRC** has worked with parents, local public school officials, and other religious communities to promote a better understanding these principles. **ICS** promotes accurate instructional materials and instruction on Jews, Judaism, and Israel by working directly with publishers and providing professional development and curricular resources to social studies teachers.



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