

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Millburn Public Schools

INFORMATION ITEM

April 4, 2011

To: Board of Education Members

From: Ellen E. Mauer, PhD

Subject: Policy 7:80- Release Time for Religious Instruction/Observance

This policy is revised to separate religious instruction and religious observances into two sections. The wording is very similar and the language and section changes do not change the intent or meaning of the policy.

We can use this as our first reading and place this on the consent agenda for next time.

## Students

### Release Time for Religious Instruction/Observance <sup>1</sup>

A student shall be released from school, as an excused absence, to observe a religious holiday or for religious instruction. The student's parent/guardian must give written notice to the Building Principal at least 5 calendar days before the student's anticipated absence(s). <sup>2</sup> This notice shall satisfy the District's requirement for a written excuse when the student returns to school.

The Superintendent shall develop and distribute to teachers appropriate procedures regarding student absences for religious reasons and include a list of religious holidays on which a student shall be excused from school attendance, how teachers are notified of a student's impending absence, and the State law requirement that teachers provide the student with an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement. <sup>3</sup>

LEGAL REF.: Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 775 ILCS 35/5.  
105 ILCS 5/26-1 and 5/26-2b.

CROSS REF.: 7:70 (Attendance and Truancy)

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The footnotes are not intended to be part of the adopted policy; they should be removed before the policy is adopted.

<sup>1</sup> 105 ILCS 5/26-1(5) requires school boards to adopt a policy on student absences for religious holidays. See also 105 ILCS 5/26-2b. State and federal law controls this policy's content. 105 ILCS 5/26-1(4) allows a child over 12 and less than 14 years of age to be absent from school while in attendance at confirmation classes. The sample policy does not contain these age or specific religious rite limitations in order to be consistent with First Amendment jurisprudence. According to the United States Supreme Court, a release time policy does not violate the Establishment Clause; it only accommodates a program of outside religious instruction. *Zorach v. Clauson*, 72 S.Ct. 679 (1952).

<sup>2</sup> Five days is the most prior notice that can be required (105 ILCS 5/26-1(5)).

<sup>3</sup> 105 ILCS 5/26-2b.

## **Students**

### **Release Time for Religious Instruction/Observance**

#### Religious Observance

A student shall be released from school, as an excused absence, for the purpose of observing a religious holiday. The parent(s)/guardian(s) must give written notice to the District 5 days before the student's anticipated absence.

The parent(s)/guardian(s)'s written notification of the student's anticipated absence shall satisfy the District's requirement for a written excuse when the student returns to school.

The Superintendent shall develop and distribute to teachers appropriate procedures regarding student absences for a religious holiday which include a list of religious holidays on which students shall be excused from attendance, how teachers are notified of a student's impending absence, and the State law requirement that teachers provide the student an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement.

#### Religious Instruction

A student shall be released from school for a day or portion of a day for the purpose of religious instruction. A letter, requesting the student's absence and written by the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), must be given to the Building Principal at least 5 days before the day the student is to be absent.

LEGAL REF.: Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 775 ILCS 35/5.  
105 ILCS 5/26-1 and 5/26-2b.

CROSS REF.: 7:70 (Attendance and Truancy)

ADOPTED: May 20, 2002