

PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

Public schools forming partnerships including faith-based communities should consider and adhere to the following in developing and supporting such activities:

THINGS TO DO:

- In selecting partners, remain neutral between secular and religious groups.
- Select student participants without regard to the religious affiliation of the students.
- Make sure any jointly sponsored activities provided within the partnership program, wherever located, are purely secular.
- Make sure any space used for the program is safe and secure for the children.
- Make sure any space used by the public school for instructional purposes is free of religious symbols.
- Put the partnership agreement in writing.

THINGS TO AVOID:

- Avoid limiting participation in the partnership or student selection to religious groups or certain religious groups.
- Avoid encouraging or discouraging student participation with particular partners based on the religious or secular nature of the organization.
- Avoid encouraging or discouraging students from engaging in religious activities.
- Avoid setting conditions on student participation in any partnership activity on membership in any religious group, or on acceptance or rejection of any religious belief, or on participation in, or refusal to participate in any religious activity.
- Avoid rewarding or punishing students (for example, regarding grades or participation in other activities) based on their willingness to participate in any activity of a partnership with a religious organization.

REMIND VOLUNTEERS OF THEIR PURPOSE

Volunteers always need to be thanked for their willingness to offer their time to help children learn. At the same time, it may be important to remind volunteers from faith communities that the purpose of any partnership is educational and secular in nature, not religious, and that volunteers must respect the First Amendment rights of students.

Remind volunteers:

- Do not pray with the students and families or encourage them to pray during your volunteer session with them.
- Do not preach about your faith to the children and their families while conducting your educational activity.
- Do not prohibit or discourage speech or other activity simply because of its religious content or nature.
- Do not infringe on the rights of students and their family members to speak about religion or to say a prayer or to read a Scripture, provided it is within the reasonable limits of rules for orderliness, talking, and congregating that are set for other speech and activities.

Adapted from:

Partnerships Involving Public Schools and Faith-Based Communities was taken from:
How Faith Communities Support Children in Public Schools; December 1999. U.S.
Department of Education.