

**Hartford Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children
Policies and Guidelines
Non-Sectarian Policy (C-05)**

Purpose: To promote compliance with Connecticut General statutes Section 10-16p (a) (1) requiring that programs supported with school Readiness funds must be non-sectarian which is defined as "any public or private School Readiness program that is not violative of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution of the United States of America." Programs funded through the Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children may include faith-based organizations but the program spaces that are purchased by state funds must be non-sectarian.

- The program must be open to all children, and cannot exclude a child based on the family's religious creed or lack thereof;
- The program cannot attempt to persuade or convert children or their families to religion or a particular religious persuasion;
- The program will not implement religious observances, such as prayer, grace, confession, church attendance, religious instruction, etc.;
- The program must accommodate the practice of a child or staff member's personal religious beliefs where the practice is required during program hours; (e.g. Islamic designated time for prayer);
- The program may not require children or their families enrolled in the School Readiness program to participate in faith-based or church sponsored activities or services;
- Programs may not discriminate in hiring based on religious affiliation or lack of religious affiliation; and
- Unless it is not practicable, classes should be conducted in rooms that are free of religious symbols and items.

If state funds are used to purchase spaces for eligible children in a School Readiness program operated by faith-based organizations, these programs must be non-sectarian (non-religious) in order not to run afoul of requirements of the Established Clause. It is not enough to allow children and/or families to "opt out" of portions of the program, which are religious in nature. To be eligible for funding, programs must comply with these requirements.

Program space is defined as wherever the children are located for School Readiness services. Sectarian items may include, but are not limited to pictures, statues, books or songs. Sectarian activities may include, but are not limited to prayer, celebration, storytelling, and/or other religious rituals.