

Guidance on Administration of UPK by Religious Schools and Other Faith-Based Organizations

This document provides initial guidance on the administration of UPK programs by religious schools and other faith-based organizations. Additional policies will be developed based on this guidance in order to advance the Department of Education's programmatic goals and quality expectations.

1. Religious Symbols

- Unless it is not practicable, providers must agree to remove or cover any and all religious signs, names, identification, symbols or insignias on the exterior entrance designated to be used by students and in those parts of the interior of the building to be used by the students in connection with the UPK Program.¹

2. Sunday Instruction

- Sunday instruction is permissible.
- District must provide accommodations to families who cannot attend on Sundays.

3. Professional Development on Sundays, Legal Holidays and During the Week Prior to School Opening

- According to NYSED guidelines, there can be no Superintendent's Conference Days on Saturdays, Sundays, legal holidays or in July.
- May schedule such days prior to the first day of school (though not on Saturdays, Sundays, legal holidays or in July)

4. Hiring

- Providers may, to the extent permitted by law, give preference to job applicants of the same religion or denomination.
- Services, however, must be delivered in a non-sectarian manner.

5. Cultural & Historical Instruction Using Texts from Religious Traditions

- Religious instruction is not permitted.
- Texts from religious traditions (e.g., the Bible, Torah, Qu'ran, etc.) may be used when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education using developmentally appropriate strategies in ways that advance the state pre-k learning standards. For example, instruction may focus on the characters and events in a story and cultural connections to text.
- Such texts may be used in conjunction with other, secular children's literature.

6. Blessings in the Context of Meals

- School staff may not lead, require, organize or call for prayer by students during the school day.
- Staff need not prevent students who wish to pray before meals from doing so.

7. Language of Instruction

- Programs must include an English learning component, even if some portion of instruction is conducted in a non-English language.
- As students acquire English over the course of the school year, more instruction should be conducted in English.

8. Religious Instruction in the Middle of the Day

- Not permitted

¹ Artifacts, such as mezuzahs, that do not on their face feature religious symbols need not be removed or covered.