

## **ACCOMMODATION OF SINCERE BELIEFS IN REQUIRED INSTRUCTION**

The curriculum of the Gorham School Department is designed to meet statutory requirements and includes other areas of study deemed appropriate by the professional staff and the School Committee. The curriculum includes topics and materials that are age and ability appropriate to the students.

The School Committee acknowledges that from time to time individual students may be exposed to some ideas and materials with which they or their parent/legal guardian do not agree. Students and their parents cannot be required to adopt ideas with which they disagree, but such disagreement alone is not a sufficient basis to exempt a student from the prescribed curriculum. Exemptions from the required curriculum should be minimized because they can detract from the overall instruction provided to the class as a whole and the educational objectives sought to be achieved by the curriculum.

The School Committee recognizes, however, that there could be topics in the curriculum which may be objectionable to individual students based on their particular, sincerely held religious, moral or philosophical beliefs. Alteration of instruction which infringes on such beliefs may be requested by the parent(s)/legal guardian.

Requests for accommodation of beliefs in instruction must be made in writing to the building principal and are subject to the approval of the Principal. The Principal shall notify the Superintendent as soon as practicable of any request for accommodation from instruction and of his/her decision. If the Principal denies an accommodation request, the parent/legal guardian may appeal to the Superintendent, whose decision shall be final.

In considering requests for accommodation, factors that the Principal should consider may include the following:

- A. Whether the course of instruction is required by state law or regulations, or School Committee policy.
- B. Whether an accommodation will adversely affect the instruction provided to other students.
- C. The educational importance of the material or instruction from which exemption is requested.
- D. Evidence regarding the sincerity of the belief on which the accommodation request is based.
- E. Whether the school has a legal obligation to accommodate the request. In the case of curriculum aligned with the system of Learning Results, if there is a conflict with the sincerely held religious beliefs of a student or his/her parent/legal guardian,

accommodation in the curriculum shall be made for the student. If the accommodation is so great that the validity of the local assessment system is compromised, the Superintendent will determine how to address this, subject to approval of the Commissioner of Education.

F. Other factors that bear upon the particular request.

When a student is exempted from a portion of the regular curriculum, the staff will make reasonable efforts, within the scope of existing resources, to accommodate alternative instruction for the student. Alternative instruction may be provided by the school or through approved independent study. Any alternative instruction shall be approved in advance by the Principal in consultation with the classroom teacher, and shall meet the standards and objectives of the part of the curriculum that is being replaced.

Legal Reference: Title 20-A MRSA Section 6209  
LD 1536, Chapter 51 Resolves  
Chapters 127 and 131 (Maine Department of Education Rules)

Cross Reference: ADF – School District Commitment to Learning Results  
IJJ – Instructional and Library Materials Selection

Adopted: March 10, 2004