

WELLESLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

40 KINGSBURY STREET, WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS 02461-4827

BELLA T. WONG
Superintendent of Schools



781.446.6210
Ext. 4505
FAX 781.446.6207

September 16, 2010

Dear Parents,

All sixth graders at the Middle School take a social studies course titled, "Enduring Beliefs and the World Today". A portion of the course focuses on beliefs that are strong today and includes an introduction to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Each teaching unit is developed similarly for consistency of presentation with the following construct: Stories of Origin and Important People (Early History), Core Beliefs, Holy Writings, Symbols & Objects, Holy Places & Places of Worship, Rituals & Rites of Passage, and Celebrations & Holidays.

The course currently includes a field trip visit to a synagogue and a mosque. Also included is attendance at a gospel music performance and meeting with representatives of the Hindu religion. These activities provide experiences for our students that enhance their understanding of the curriculum. Students only participate in these events with parental permission. Parents are also invited to attend field trips and have served as chaperones for us.

Last May, our students visited a mosque located in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Because it is an active place of worship, it was anticipated that prayer would occur during the students' visit. Due to the number of students in grade six, half of the students (200) were able to attend one of two scheduled days. On the second scheduled day, a representative of the Mosque told students they were welcome to join in the prayer that was occurring. Five students chose to participate. A parent made a video recording of this. Students are shown to be imitating the act of prayer.

The purpose of the field trip was for students to visit and observe a place of worship. It was not the intent for students to be able to participate in any of the religious practices. The fact that any students were allowed to do so in this case was an error.

I extend my sincere apologies for the error that occurred and regret the offense it may have caused. In the future, teachers will provide more clear guidance to students to better define what is allowed to fulfill the purpose of observation. As always, we continue to be open to feedback on experiences we provide for children. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bella T. Wong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Bella T. Wong