

Guidelines for Religious Holidays

The Harvard Public Schools will be open for school on religious holidays with the exception of state or national holidays. The School Committee will review this policy of keeping schools open on all religious holidays, if the Superintendent of Schools, in collaboration with the faculty and administration, determines, based upon an analysis of the prior year's attendance data, that overall attendance will be such as to render the opening of school impractical or uneconomic.

The right of parents to excuse their children from school attendance for the purposes of religious observance is understood and supported by the Harvard Public Schools. It is the intent of these guidelines that any student exercising their right under this policy will incur no penalty in their academic studies, athletics, extracurricular or other activities related to the schools.

1. The school's annual calendar will be prepared to include the names and dates of major religious observances.
2. The superintendent will identify and appropriately delineate the major religious observances and dates in collaboration with local clergy and community representatives. This must also include the date, and where applicable, the time observance commences.
3. The approved calendar will be distributed and discussed as part of mandatory school employee training at the start of each school year. To the extent possible this may additionally extend into the district's annual professional development plans.
4. District employees must also review and comply with accommodations for religious observances as provided for in contracts of employment and staff guidelines as well as building handbooks.

Religious Holidays Guidelines – Student Activities

School district employees may not schedule any of the following activities during major religious holidays in accordance with details recorded on the annual calendar.

- A. Major exams, standardized tests and reviews for same are not permitted. Any concerns about the makeup of work following a religious holiday will be brought to the attention of the teacher and where necessary the building principal.
- B. Tryouts for teams, plays and other similar activities are not permitted.
- C. Major events such as proms, dances, student elections, music concerts and plays etc are not permitted.
- D. All athletic and other extracurricular activities must be scheduled in such a way as to minimize conflict with designated religious holidays. Any activity scheduled to cause a conflict must be reviewed and approved by the superintendent.

Homework assignments and make up privileges associated with observance of religious holidays will be regarded as excused absences and treated the same as the make-up privileges offered to a student who has an excused absence due to illness or other reasons.

Religious objects or symbols may be displayed as integral parts of a curriculum unit but should not be presented in a manner that promotes or encourages any view concerning religion.

The use of music, plays, symbols, customs or other activities at a given season of the year in recognition of a particular holiday will be undertaken in a consistent manner throughout the school year. For example, the use of music in the schools appropriate for the recognition of a particular holiday will be considered acceptable only as part of a year-long approach which involves the music of other significant holidays and cultures. Similarly the issue of decorations, plays and parties must be viewed within such a year-long context. However, in all cases, the use of these techniques must be linked to the curriculum that is to enhance an understanding of the holiday not toward a celebration of that holiday.

Approved: December 13, 2010

Reviewed: May 20, 2013

LEGAL REF.: All Collective Bargaining Agreements