

**TO:** Building Administrators  
**FROM:** Superintendent Gustavo Balderas  
**DATE:** November 6, 2019  
**<sup>1</sup>RE:** Religious Holidays

Dear administrators:

We are lucky to work in a community where diverse viewpoints and religions thrive and are valued. As we enter the holiday season, I am writing to ensure a common understanding about our responsibilities as public educators on the one hand to accommodate student's religious beliefs and expression, and on the other, to refrain from promoting or endorsing religious beliefs and messages.

**Scheduling school-wide events** – The district encourages administrators to avoid scheduling important school-wide events such as school picture day, orientation about college financial aid, concerts and student-family engagement events that conflict with religious holidays and observances. Major religious holy days are listed at the bottom of this email.

**Absences and Instruction**– Students needing to be excused from attending school to observe religious holy days shall receive an excused absence, and shall have a meaningful opportunity and reasonable time to make up missed work. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to be aware of major religious holidays and that scheduling tests and field trips on those days may cause conflicts for some students. By giving advance notice of tests and other important events, these potential conflicts can be avoided or accommodated. In all cases, requests by students to make up tests, quizzes, or extra credit missed due to religious observance shall be honored. In considering perfect attendance, schools may not withhold an award for an absence occasioned by religious beliefs.

In accordance with state law, students may be released from school each week for religious instruction; staff may neither encourage nor discourage student participation.

**Observance of Religious Holidays** – Schools may not observe religious holidays or promote religious practices. Schools must maintain religious neutrality. However, schools may teach *about* religions, religious freedom, and religious holidays with the purpose of meeting non-religious educational objectives.

Traditional religious music is permitted only as a minor part of school-sponsored activity or program during the holidays. Displaying religious symbols such as a cross, nativity scene or Star of David, is prohibited. Gift exchanges should be avoided as there will be students who cannot participate, causing feelings of

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<sup>1</sup> Superintendent Memo Re: Religious Holidays

isolation and distress. The display of Christmas trees on school and district properties leads to complaints by staff and members of the public and is prohibited.

**Religious Expression by Staff/ School** – Teachers, depending on the level and curricular subject area, may teach *about* religion, but may not provide religious instruction to students, pray with them, or share religious literature.

**Religious Expression by Students** – Students must be permitted to express their religious beliefs in assignments and artwork, which should be graded based on neutral academic standards. Students may not, however, proselytize in oral presentations during class time. Student work that, on the student’s own initiative, incorporates a religious theme may be displayed on the same basis as student work without any religious theme. Teachers should not assign the creation of religious artwork, poetry or other work product.

**1. Jewish Holy Days:** Many Jewish children will not be attending school or school activities on major Jewish holy days. These days are as follows:

Rosh Hashanah, sunset on September 29 to sunset on October 1, 2019

Yom Kippur, sunset on October 8 to sunset on October 9, 2019

Passover, sunset on April 8, 2020 to sunset on April 16, 2020 (especially first days, sunset on April 8-9, and concluding days, sunset on April 15-16)

**2. Christian Holy Days:** You should also be sensitive about scheduling special events on Christian holy days. Many students have conflicts when programs are scheduled during Easter week.

Christmas, December 25, 2019

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

Easter, April 12, 2020

**3. Muslim Holy Days:** In 2020, Ramadan will be observed sunset April 23, 2020 through May 23, 2020. Many Muslim children will fast from sunrise to sunset each day during this holy month. The final day is Id al-Fitr, a day of feasting to celebrate the end of Ramadan.