

ACCOMODATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

The Reading Public Schools educates children from many different religious and ethnic backgrounds. It shall be the Policy of the Reading Public Schools, out of respect for family values and our different religious and ethnic traditions, and in accordance with state and federal law, to provide accommodations for those students who are absent from school for religious observances.

I. District Policy

In accordance with M.G.L. c. 151C, § 2B, students who are unable, because of religious beliefs, to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement on a particular day, shall be excused from any such examination or study or work requirement, and shall be provided with an opportunity to make up such examination, study, or work requirement which he or she may have missed because of such absence on any particular day; provided, however, that such makeup examination or work shall not create an unreasonable burden upon the school. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the Reading Public Schools, PTO or Booster group for making available to the student such opportunity. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because of his availing himself of the provisions of M.G.L. c 151C, § 2B.

A. Major Non-National Religious Holidays-For the purpose of this policy, major non-national religious holidays are identified as the following:

- Two days of Rosh Hashanah (holiday begins at sundown the night before);
 - Yom Kippur (holiday begins at sundown the night before);
 - The first day of Passover, which begins at sundown the night before with the first Seder supper and ends after the second Seder supper on the evening of the first day; and
 - Good Friday
1. No assignments will be due for any student the day of or the day after a Major Non-National Religious Holidays.
 2. No tests or quizzes will be scheduled on the day of a Major Non-National Religious Holiday.
 3. No one-time events such as field trips, music performances, theatre plays and productions, auditions, and back to school functions will be scheduled on the day of a Major Non-National Religious Holiday.
 4. The Superintendent will develop a set of implementation regulations (See IMDA-R), which will be communicated each year to staff and the school community prior to major non-national religious holidays.

B. Calendar

1. Prior to the School Committee approving the annual calendar, the Superintendent of Schools will identify and recommend other (if any) major non-national religious

- holidays on an on-going basis and communicate them on the school calendar at the beginning of the school year.
2. School calendars distributed to teachers, staff, and families shall include those major religious and ethnic holidays whose observance would require absence from school or other accommodations;
 3. The first day of the school year shall not be scheduled on a major non-national religious holiday.

II. Individual Accommodations for Students Who Observe Other Religious Holidays

- A. For other religious holidays not mentioned above, teachers should work in a proactive and sensitive manner with students who are observing those religious holidays to provide individual accommodations, and to reassure students by affirming school policy whenever appropriate.

III. Absences on Religious Holidays

- A. Parents and students (if age appropriate) are encouraged to notify the school in advance when their child will be not be attending school because of religious or ethnic observance.
- B. Discrimination against any student, because of such individual's religious/ethnic belief or practice, or any absence based on said belief or practice is prohibited.
 1. Any pupil absent from school because of a religious or ethnic holiday may not be deprived of any award or eligibility or opportunity to compete for any award because of such absence;
 2. Students whose conscientious observance of a religious or ethnic holiday conflicts with participating in a school-scheduled event such as tryouts, athletic contests, theatricals, or concerts, will not be required to participate nor penalized for their non-participation;
 3. Any absence because of religious or ethnic holiday must be recorded as an excused absence for religious observance in the school register or in any group or class attendance record.

Approved by Reading School Committee on January 13, 2014.

Revised and Approved by Reading School Committee on September 11, 2017.

References: Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 151C, Section 2B

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Implementation Regulations

There are many cultures and religions that celebrate holidays during the school year. The major non-national religious holidays, as defined in School Committee Policy, IMDA, are as follows:

- Two days of Rosh Hashanah (holiday begins at sundown the night before);
- Yom Kippur (holiday begins at sundown the night before);
- The first day of Passover, which begins at sundown the night before with the first Seder supper and ends after the second Seder supper on the evening of the first day; and
- Good Friday.

It is important to note that even though a holiday may end at sundown, students and families may still be gathering as part of the observance and will not be available to attend events and complete assignments for the rest of that day and evening.

State and federal laws require schools to make reasonable accommodation to the religious needs of students in observance of holy days. With respect to students, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 151C, section 2B reads in relevant part as follows:

“Any student in an educational or vocational training institution...who is unable, because of his religious beliefs, to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study or work requirement on a particular day shall be excused from any such examination or study or work requirement, and shall be provided with an opportunity to make up such examination, study or work requirement which he may have missed because of such absence on any particular day....No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because of his availing himself of the provisions of this section.”

As with any policy, implementation is important and each stakeholder plays a critical role in the implementation. Below are the guidelines for administrators, teachers, parents and students in implementing Policy IMDA.

I. Administrators

- a) Send out the School Committee approved district calendar listing all religious holidays;
- b) The first day of the school year shall not be scheduled on a major non-national religious holiday;
- c) Communicate to remind parents to contact their child’s teacher or school and let them know that their child will be absent for religious observances. The main office shall let the child’s teacher or teachers know the students that will be out on the religious holidays;
- d) Parent, student or school community events should not be scheduled on major non-national religious holidays;
- e) Any pupil absent from school because of a religious holiday may not be deprived of any award or eligibility or opportunity to compete for any award because of such absence;
- f) Any absence because of religious holiday must be recorded as an excused absence for religious observance in the school register or in any group or class attendance record; and

II. Teachers, Coaches, Advisors

1. Teachers, coaches, and advisors shall refrain from the following teaching and learning activities and extracurricular opportunities on major non-national religious holidays:
 - a) Teaching difficult to make-up material;
 - b) Having a single day of exam preparation;
 - c) Scheduling tests or quizzes;
 - d) Assigning homework;
 - e) Scheduling one-time events such as field trips, music performances, theatre plays and productions, auditions, and back to school functions; and
 - f) Scheduling home athletic/extra-curricular events, and, if possible, offsite/away athletic/extra-curricular events.
2. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate and provide regular instruction on major non-national religious holidays which include hands-on learning, classroom discussions, and mini-lessons of direct instruction as aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Planning for these days should include the type of accommodations that can be made for any student who will be absent and how they will be able to access the classroom information.
3. No assignments will be due the day of or the school day after a major non-national religious holiday. [For example, a long term assignment cannot be due the day of Yom Kippur or the next school day after Yom Kippur.]
4. Any materials needed for make-up such as movies or media, should be easily and flexibly accessible within a reasonably determined time frame.
5. Coaches and advisors may hold practices, meetings or rehearsals on school days during major non-national religious holidays. However, students whose conscientious observance of a religious or ethnic holiday conflicts with participating in a practice or rehearsal will not be required to participate nor penalized for their non-participation. [For example, if a student-athlete is absent from school to observe the Good Friday religious holiday and misses track practice, they will not be penalized by not being able to participate in the next meet.]
6. Students may miss school and extra-curricular activities in order to participate in celebrations of their families' major religious and ethnic holidays and will not be penalized in any way. For example, if a student misses school to observe Rosh Hashanah and their teacher gives a participation grade, they will not receive a participation grade of zero for class on those days.
7. Parent, student or school community events should not be scheduled on major non-national religious holidays.
8. Individual accommodations will be provided to students which allow them to participate in their family religious or ethnic observances without detriment to their education or grades. Some examples of these accommodations could include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a) Extensions of due dates on assigned work (at a minimum the extension should be the number of days absent plus one additional day);
 - b) Opportunities to make up material missed in class;
 - c) Rescheduling of a test or quiz for students who missed the preparation day;
 - d) Videotaping the lesson and allowing the student to access the video;
 - e) Having a classroom peer take notes from the lesson and share it with the student.

- f) Altering the time of a student's presentation;
- g) Allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work;
- h) Arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment dates. The guidepost for any extensions in assignment due dates should be reasonableness. For example, if the student had a relatively long period of time in which to complete the assignment, an extension may not be necessary. On the other hand, if the assignment was assigned with relatively short notice, and completion of the assignment would require the student to work over the religious holiday, an extension should be allowed;
- i) Letting a student attend a different discussion section for the same class that week;
- j) Assigning the student appropriate make-up work that is intrinsically no more difficult than the original assignment; and
- k) Other reasonable accommodations as may be appropriate.

III. Parents and Students

1. Parents and students (if age appropriate) are encouraged to notify the school in advance when their child will be not be attending school because of religious or ethnic observance.
2. Parents should follow the normal procedures when their child is going to be absent to observe the religious holiday and call the parent verification system at the school on the day of the absence or notify the school in advance by email, written note, or phone. If a child is to receive an excused absence for religious observance, the parent must indicate that information in the correspondence with the school.
3. Parent, student or school community events, including PTO and School Council meetings, should not be scheduled on major non-national religious holidays.