

IMDE - Cultural and Religious Holidays

RSU 26 is committed to honoring the diversity within our schools. This includes religious diversity. The district wishes to ensure that students are free to celebrate important cultural and religious holidays with their families.

A. Calendars and school schedules

RSU 26 seeks to avoid scheduling special events that conflict with religious holidays. RSU 26 recognizes that in a community of diverse beliefs it likely will be impossible to avoid all holidays of significance to all of its families. RSU 26 also has limited control over the timing of some school-related events like sports schedules. Recognizing these limitations, the superintendent or designee shall:

1. Ensure that the dates of the frequently observed holidays listed in IMDE-R Section A are placed on all school master calendars and communicated to all staff.
2. Ensure principals and teachers will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling large-attendance events to occur on the holidays listed in IMDE-R Section A. Examples of such events include but are not limited to field trips, guest speakers, major class exams, standardized testing, picture-days, first days of school, homecoming, prom, graduation, open houses, parent/guardian nights, parent/guardian-teacher conferences, concerts, plays and college readiness nights.
3. Assist RSU 26 employees in making reasonable efforts to advocate for avoiding scheduling of regional or sports conference events on holidays listed in IMDE-R Section A, but recognize that this will not be possible in every case
4. Attempt to reasonably address concerns about conflicts raised by parents/guardians for holidays not listed in IMDE-R Section A recognizing that it may not be possible to avoid all conflict with any holiday observed by a family in the school community.

B. Fasting holidays

RSU 26 recognizes that some religious holidays involve fasting and/or refraining from drink. While this may not place restrictions on regular sedentary school activities, it may present health or equity concerns around food, drink and exercise. These holidays may or may not be the same holidays that would cause conflicts in attendance addressed in section A. Towards these ends, the superintendent or designee shall:

1. At the start of each school year provide all staff the dates of holidays involving fasting or not drinking listed in IMDE-R Section B.
2. Encourage staff including especially physical education teachers and coaches to be mindful of and respectful towards the desirability of limiting strenuous physical activity for students who are fasting or not drinking
3. Encourage staff to avoid scheduling special events involving food or drink or increased physical activity on these days
4. Fasting or non-drinking students will always be allowed an opportunity to request to be in an alternative food not-present location (e.g. library) during lunchtimes and times food is present in their classroom

5. To maximize the district's ability to be sensitive to issues around fasting and dietary restrictions, we request that parents/guardians notify the student's teachers, administrator, and coaches at least three days in advance of the holiday-based fasting or dietary restriction, but lack of advance notice will not change the rights of students and families in this section.

C. Student absences for religious holidays

1. Regardless of whether a religious holiday is listed in IMDE-R or not, solely at the discretion of the student and family, a student may choose to be absent from school or a sport or extra-curricular activity for any religious holiday important in their religious or faith practices.
2. Such student absences from school will always be considered excused absences upon parental request in-person or by note
3. To maximize the educational experience of the student, we request that parent/guardians notify the student's teachers, administrator, and coaches at least three days in advance of the holiday-based absence, but lack of advance notice will not change the rights of students and families in this section.
4. Teachers will allow students to turn in any work due during a religious holiday upon their return after the holiday. Teachers will allow students to make up classroom work missed during a religious holiday. Teachers will not require students to take an exam the day they return from a religious holiday (because studying during the holiday is often not possible).
5. Coaches will not use absence for a religious holiday as a reason to penalize or decrease the student's involvement in games.
6. Absences for religious holidays will not count against a student for attendance awards.

D. School concerts/cultural activities

1. School Concerts/Cultural Activities will be planned to be as inclusive as possible of the range of cultural and religious traditions present in our community.
2. Holiday activities should be planned in conjunction with or in support of the educational goals of the school.
3. Acknowledgement of a holiday will emphasize the historical, cultural, and social value of the holiday and the associated religion, and will not be used to endorse any religion or holiday.
4. Discussion of religious holidays shall not be limited to the doctrines or principles of any one religion, sect, or denomination.

E. List of frequently observed religious holidays

1. The board will from time to time review the list of frequently observed religious holidays in IMDE-R. The board recognizes that the list of the frequently observed holidays in the community may change over time as our population of students changes.
2. At or before the beginning of each school year, the superintendent or designee will identify the dates on which the holidays listed in IMDE-R occur. Such determination is

encouraged to involve consultation with local community religious leaders to ensure that dates are accurate to address complexities such as holidays that are based on a lunar calendar or that span sunset to sunset.

F. Concerns

1. Anytime a parent/guardian has a concern that the policy is not being followed or that a student's rights are not being respected under this policy, they should follow the standard process for resolving concerns (Policy BHC)
2. Members of the community may also make a request to the Superintendent or board for frequently observed religious holidays in the community that are not listed in IMDE-R

Adopted: June 4, 2019

IMDE-R List of frequently observed religious holidays and fasting holidays

Section A - frequently observed religious holidays in the community

(See district calendar for exact dates each year)

Note: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr are based on solar days. The holidays start at sunset and run into the next day. External calendars may list the date of either the first or second sunset so care should be used. RSU 26 calendars will list the specific time period during which to avoid scheduling other events. Also note, most of these holidays change their date every year.

Rosh Hashanah (Jewish; Early fall holiday)

Yom Kippur (Jewish; Early fall holiday)

Chanukah (Jewish; Early winter Holiday that lasts multiple days but RSU scheduling avoidance is just for the first night).

First night of Passover (Jewish; Spring holiday that lasts multiple days but RSU scheduling avoidance is just for the first night)

Christmas (Christian; December 24-25)

Easter (Christian; Spring holiday)

Ash Wednesday (Christian; late Winter holiday; RSU scheduling avoidance is for evening only)

Eid al-Fitr (Muslim; date moves to different seasons depending on year)

Eid al-Adha (Muslim; date moves to different seasons depending on year)

Section B -frequently observed fasting or dietarily restricted holidays in the community

Yom-Kippur (Jewish; fasting and refraining from drink)

Passover (Jewish; diet restrictions, not fasting)

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and Fridays in Lent (Christian; dietary restrictions)

Ramadan (Muslim; fasting and refraining from drink; lasts a lunar month - roughly 28-29 days - ending at Eid al-Fitr)

May be updated pursuant to section E.1 and F.2 of the policy

NEPN/NSBA CODE: IMDE