
Religious Observances

As a public school district, JCPS must be neutral regarding religion, but this neutrality exists in tension with the district's responsibility to be sensitive to the needs of individual students and their families so that no students are penalized because of their beliefs. This advisory describes general approaches, and it notes areas requiring particular attention and action. Groups are listed in alphabetical order.

For a comprehensive list of religious, cultural, and national holidays, visit www.jcpsky.net/Programs/mconnections/calendar.html.

All Groups, All Seasons

- The district's policy on absence for religious observances is as follows:

Students who are absent for religious observances receive excused absences. They have the number of days they were absent, plus one, to make up work. Students may not be required to turn in make-up assignments on the day of their return after the observance. Such a requirement would constitute the school's interference with the religious observance.
- Scheduling special events during the school day, as well as during after-school and evening activities, requires sensitivity in order to avoid forcing students to choose between major school events and major religious events
 - Consult the calendar in this planner. When do various groups in your school observe major events? Talk with your school's families. Who observes holidays that are not congruent with the civil calendar? Does the day begin at sundown or sunup? Are they "Sabbath" (no work/no school) holidays? Are there special dietary needs that School and Community Nutrition Services should consider? Are there times when field trips will be difficult because of students' dietary needs or special religious responsibilities?
 - Plan around these dates when scheduling one-time events that cannot be made up (e.g., Open House, homecoming, graduation, major tests, reviews for major tests, introducing new material or skills if no make-up is feasible—any major event that will put absent students at a disadvantage). Some coaches choose to avoid scheduling athletic events on days that team members will be absent for religious observances.
 - When planning weekend events, assess the feasibility of scheduling some events on Sunday so that all groups share the responsibility for being flexible and understanding.
 - Give attention to the patterns of students' participation in evening religious activities. Consider creating a flexible homework schedule so students don't have major homework on evenings when they worship until 8 or 9 p.m.

— As our community becomes more diverse, the need to give attention to food choices becomes more important. We now have many people who eat no meat, so the need for alternatives is becoming the rule rather than the exception. The School and Community Nutrition Services director will assist your cafeteria manager in identifying appropriate alternative selections.

- Talk with parents! Keep in mind that families' expectations are not uniform—even within the same group. Ongoing, open conversation with members of your school community is critical to addressing religion appropriately in our diverse district.
- Use the district's resources for assistance in addressing issues concerning religion and the public schools. Please call the Diversity/Multicultural Education specialist at **485-7075** or the director of Compliance and Investigations at **485-3341**.

Bahai

The Bahai faith was founded in 1863 in Persia and emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind. Members of the Bahai community observe nine days each year when they refrain from working; these observances begin at sundown the day before the stated date. Talk with your Bahai families to identify dates affecting them.

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in Northern India by the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. He lived from approximately 566 to 480 B.C. As the son of an Indian warrior-king, Gautama lived a royal life and later ventured into the world in search of understanding. The culmination of his search came while meditating, where he came to understand how to be free from suffering and, ultimately, how to achieve salvation. Following this epiphany, he was known as the Buddha, meaning the "Enlightened One." The Four Noble Truths make up the essence of Buddha's teaching. They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Buddhist practices such as meditation are means of changing one's self in order to develop the qualities of awareness, kindness, and wisdom. Practitioners follow many different forms of Buddhism, but the tenets of nonviolence, lack of dogma, and tolerance of differences characterize all traditions.

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Christianity

Because the civil calendar generally reflects the Western Christian liturgical year, Christian families experience few problems with scheduling.

- On **Ash Wednesday, February 25**, some staff and students might be absent for at least part of the day.
- Throughout **Lent**, some Christian students and staff members will have food restrictions that require alternative menus. The Nutrition Services director works with cafeteria managers to identify appropriate alternative selections.
- **Holy Week, April 5–11**, brings special responsibilities for some students, making it impossible for them to complete major assignments or to participate in evening activities or overnight trips. Schools having Christian students will want to avoid scheduling major events on **Ash Wednesday** evening, **February 25**; on **Good Friday, April 10**; and on **Easter Sunday, April 12**.

Eastern Orthodox Christian Observances

The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church follows the Julian Calendar, rather than the Gregorian Calendar of the Western churches. **Orthodox Lent** begins on **Monday, March 2**, and ends on **Sunday, April 19**. **Orthodox Easter (Holy Pascha)** is celebrated on **Sunday, April 19**. Orthodox Christian students and staff may not be present for school/work on **Orthodox Holy Friday (Good Friday), April 17**. Please be aware that throughout Lent, Orthodox students and staff honor certain food restrictions and are at times required to attend religious activities in the evenings. Most local-area Orthodox Christians celebrate **Christmas** on **December 25**.

Hinduism

Hinduism is India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by nearly 1 billion people. Most adherents reside in India, but there are large Hindu populations in many other countries. Also called *Sanatana Dharma*, "eternal religion," and *Vaidika Dharma*, "religion of the Vedas," Hinduism encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies that range from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, and Smartism. These four denominations hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet they share a vast heritage of culture and belief: karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the many yogas, the guru-nishya tradition, and a reliance on the Vedas as scriptural authority.

Islam

Islam is the complete submission and obedience to Allah (God). The faithful of Islam refer to themselves as Muslims. One of the pillars of Islam is fasting. Every year, Muslims engage in a 30-day, sunup-to-sundown fast called **Ramadan**. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. During 2008, Ramadan begins at sundown on **Tuesday, September 2**, and will end at sundown on **Thursday, October 2**. The school can best support fasting students by helping curious students understand the nature and purpose of fasting, by voicing their own support for commitment to a goal, and by discouraging students' teasing and challenging fasting students' commitment to the discipline. **Eid ul Fitr** occurs after the end of the month of Ramadan. Eid is celebrated after the sighting of the new crescent on the previous evening. The day the fast is broken, prayers begin at 4 a.m.; those observing the holiday will be absent for at least the morning.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian group who avoid practices that have come down from ancient nature religions as well as celebrations related to earthly governments. Practically speaking, that eliminates all of the holidays observed by other religious groups and the culture at large. They take very seriously their responsibility to witness to their beliefs, so even the youngest children are taught to refrain from engaging in conventional school celebrations. Some children are permitted to participate in class activities that focus on teaching about celebrations as an integral part of the instructional content. Jehovah's Witnesses place very high value on education, are eager to support the school, and deeply appreciate ongoing conversation with teachers.

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Judaism

Schools can expect Jewish students and staff to be absent from school and unavailable for afternoon/evening activities on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover. Some members of the Jewish community observe additional holy days during the year. Talking with your Jewish families is critical to effective planning in this area.

- Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown **Monday, September 29**, and ends at sundown **Wednesday, October 1**. Jewish students and staff members will be unavailable for after-school activities on **Monday** and all day **Tuesday** and **Wednesday**.
- **Yom Kippur** begins at sundown **Wednesday, October 8**, and ends at sundown **Thursday, October 9**. Jewish students and staff members will be unavailable for participation in after-school activities on **Wednesday** and will be absent from school on **Thursday**.
- **Sukkot (Harvest Festival)** begins at sundown **Monday, October 13**, and ends at sundown **Tuesday, October 21**. Local Jewish leaders report that only a small number of students/staff will be absent for this holiday.
- **Pesach (Passover)** begins at sundown **Wednesday, April 8**, and ends at sundown **Thursday, April 16**. All Jewish students and staff members will be absent from school-related activities on Thursday evening. **Some will also be absent from school on Friday as well as on the last two days of Passover.** During Passover, dietary requirements make overnight trips very difficult for Jewish students.
- **Shavuot** begins at sundown **Thursday, May 28**, and ends at sundown on **Saturday, May 30**. Jewish students and staff members will be absent from school-related summer activities from Thursday evening until Saturday evening.
- **Hanukkah** begins at sundown **Sunday, December 21**, and ends at sundown on **Monday, December 29**.

Seventh-Day Adventists

Doctrinally, Seventh-Day Adventists are heirs of the interfaith Millerite movement of the 1840s. Seventh-Day Adventists are Christians who observe Saturday as their Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. Adventists follow certain dietary restrictions that include not eating pork and certain seafoods. In just a century and a half, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church has grown to more than 8 million members.

Note: Members of Jewish and Seventh-Day Adventists families value public education highly and accept the fact that some school events will be scheduled during their Sabbath; however, schools serving Jewish and Seventh-Day Adventist students will want to avoid scheduling major events, such as proms and graduation ceremonies, at any time on Friday evening or on Saturday before 9 p.m.

For assistance in addressing religious issues, conducting workshops and faculty-meeting conversations, identifying competent community members to make presentations, and facilitating school-family conversations, please contact the Diversity/Multicultural Education specialist at **485-7075** or the director of Compliance and Investigations at **485-3341**.