

Guidance Regarding Religion and Religious Accommodations

Background:

During the 2019-2020 school year, Seattle Public Schools and Seattle Education Association created a joint workgroup to address equity and evaluate inclusive considerations related to religious and cultural observances and practices in developing student and work calendars. The workgroup sought to develop the calendar using the negotiated calendar formula (important dates) below, while also considering days which may have high impact on our communities. The goal of this calendar is to provide an at-a-glance look at the variety of religious holidays and observances to assist schools/teachers in planning important events, testing, and exam dates.

While we can't change school year dates to accommodate every religious/cultural observance, it is understood that students may end up missing school and important school events in order to honor their religious practices. Since our school district is so large, our communities vary in their diversity. As a result, the district recognizes individual schools know their community and are asking schools to consider the days of religious/cultural observances that would occur within their school community and the accommodations and supports that can be provided to students if schools are unable to avoid scheduling educationally significant days on religious/cultural dates. Further, Washington state law and the district's Superintendent Procedure 3121SP provides students an excused absence for the observance of a religious or cultural holiday.

This guidance being provided is based on guidance from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Important Dates:

The below dates were negotiated as a part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

- **First Day of School**
 - o The first Wednesday in September
- **State In-Service Day**
 - o As recognized by the State (typically the second Friday in October)
- **Winter Break**
 - o At least ten weekdays, ending after New Year's Day. If New Year's Day falls or is observed on a Monday, students will return to school on the next day (Tuesday)
- **Mid-Winter Break**
 - o President's Day and the following four workdays
- **Spring Break**
 - o Five days starting the second Monday in April
- **Snow Make-Up Days**
 - o At least three snow days shall be scheduled, including the day between semesters, and the first two days following the last day of school in June. Additional snow make-up days may be added in June if necessary
- **Holidays**
 - o Labor Day (when school begins before this day in September)
 - o Veteran's Day (November)
 - o Thanksgiving Day (November)
 - o The day after Thanksgiving (November)
 - o Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January)
 - o President's Day (February)
 - o Memorial Day (May)
 - o Juneteenth (June)
- **Contractual Days**

- The four days immediately preceding the start of school, except for the Friday before Labor Day
- **Conferences**
 - Three consecutive days for conferences immediately preceding Thanksgiving Day

Student Absences

See policy 3121: [Attendance](#)

Though consistent attendance for students is essential, policy 3121 does provide that religious or cultural purposes are valid excuses for an absence. See below.

Policy 3121: Consistent attendance is essential to the Seattle Public Schools mission of academic excellences for every student in every school. To combat unexcused absences and truancy, all Seattle Public Schools are dedicated to providing racially, culturally, and age appropriate instruction and interventions and supports to remove barriers to consistent daily attendance.

Policy 3121 does state that religious or cultural purposes are valid excuses for an absence.

Superintendent Procedure 3121SP VIII.B.a.3. and 12. state:

a) *B. Excused Absences a) Absences due to the following reasons must be excused pursuant to RCW 28A.225.010 or WAC 392-401-020:*

3. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction (WAC 392-401-020); and

12. A reason of faith or conscience, or for an organized activity conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization, for up to two days per school year (RCW 28A.225.010(1)(e)).

See [Policy 3121/3121SP](#) in its entirety, however it does also provide that:

- The school principal (or designee) has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence.
- If an absence is excused, the student will be permitted to make up all missed assignments outside of class under reasonable conditions and time limits established by the teacher of the class. However, in participation-type classes, a student's grade may be affected because of the student's inability to make up the activities conducted during a class period if an alternative assignment that aligns with the learning goals of the activities missed is not reasonable.
- An excused absence will be verified by a parent/guardian or an adult, emancipated or appropriately aged student, or school authority responsible for the absence. If attendance is taken electronically, either for a course conducted online or for students physically within the district, an absence will default to unexcused until such time as an excused absence may be verified by a parent/guardian or an adult, emancipated, or appropriately aged student. If a student of any age is to be released for health care related to family planning or abortion, the student may require that the District keep the information confidential. Students thirteen and older have the right to keep information about drug, alcohol or mental health treatment confidential. Students fourteen and older have the same confidentiality rights regarding HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

Religious Accommodations for Students

See policy 2340: [Religion and Religious Accommodation](#)

Policy 2340 also states that students shall be excused from attending school in observance of a religious holiday.

Policy 2340: Upon receipt of a parent/guardian request, a student shall be excused from attending school in

observance of a religious holiday. Students who are excused from class a religious accommodation must have an opportunity to make up any work, assignment or test missed as a result of the absence.

Policy 2340SP: The student's parent/guardian must submit a written request to the principal of the student's school, well enough in advance to allow the school to make appropriate arrangements and scheduling adjustments.

The written request must state –

1. The specific accommodation requested
2. Why the accommodation is needed
3. The amount of time, duration, and frequency of the accommodation

Testing dates - All dates are tentative until confirmed by testing agencies.

School staff should consider these testing windows and their building activities to make proper considerations for their school communities religious and cultural observances.

2023-24 State Assessment Windows

- **WaKIDS:** Data entered in TS Gold by November 15, 2023
- **WIDA Annual:** January 29 to March 22, 2024
- **WA-AIM:** January 29 to May 3, 2024
- **SBA ELA & Math:** March 4 to June 7, 2024
- **WCAS Science:** April 8 to June 7, 2024

SAT/PSAT will be in October and AP will be in May.

Religion and Religious Accommodations, 2023-2024

This aims to expand the awareness about the multiple forms of diversity among our students and families, and the days that students may or not be at school due to religious observances and the days that students may be fasting. It may also be helpful to guide better times to schedule educationally significant activities when the date can't be changed. For example, testing in the morning during periods when students eat at sundown.

The purpose of the calendar below is to assist in this effort to raise awareness about religious holidays practiced in public schools across the state of Washington.

This calendar was provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction based on the University of Washington's Calendar of Holidays and Religious Observances.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction encourages districts not to schedule significant school events on major religious holidays. Schools that plan around major religious holidays convey to all students that they are a meaningful part of their school communities and their religious traditions matter^[1]

Notes:

All Jewish, Islamic, and Bahá'í holidays begin at sundown (SD) on the evening before the first date shown

+These holidays (or dates within holidays) are designated non-work (observance) days

#Some of these dates are not fixed to a calendar but rather based on the actual sighting of the moon and therefore may be some variance by a day

*Please be sensitive to and accommodate student observers' needs due to fasting on all of the dates and the evening prior to the date(s), these dates are listed in **BOLD** type*

The following information is from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction:

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/equity-and-civil-rights/information-families-civil-rights-washington-schools/religion-schools/common-religious-and-us-public-holiday-calendars>

Common Religious and Public Holidays for the 2023-2024 school year

NOTE:

All Jewish and Islamic holidays begin at sundown on the evening before the first date shown.

* These holidays (or dates within holidays) are designated non-work (observance) days.

Some of these dates are not fixed to a calendar but based on the actual sighting of the moon and therefore there may be some variance by a day.

June 28-29, 2023 (Wed-Thurs), Eid-al-Adha, Islamic

July 19, 2023 (Wed), First day of Muharram (Al Hijrah New Year), Islamic, Muharram is the first month in the Islamic calendar. The first day of Muharram is considered by many Muslims as the start of the New year for Islam.

September 4, 2023 (Mon), Labor Day, No school

September 6-7, 2023 (Wed-Thurs), Janmashtami, Hindu

September 15-17, 2023 (Fri-Sun), *Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Jewish, Rosh Hashanah kicks off several weeks of Jewish holidays in the fall. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the two most-observed Jewish Holidays, called the high holy days.

Designated non-work day for observers.

September 24-25, 2023 (Sun-Mon), *Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Jewish, Holiest and most observed Jewish holiday.

Designated non-work day for observers.

September 26-27, 2023 (Tues-Wed), Mawlid-al-Nabi (Birthday of Mohammad), Islamic

September 29-October 6, 2023 (Fri-Fri), *Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles), Jewish, Designated non-work day for observers.

October 6-8, 2023 (Fri-Sun), *Shmini Atzeret, Jewish, Designated non-work day for observers.

October 7-8, 2023 (Sat-Sun), *Simchat Torah, Jewish, Designated non-work day for observers.

October 9, 2023 (Mon), Indigenous Peoples' Day

October 15-23, 2023 (Sun-week after following Mon), Navaratri/Dassehra, Hindu, Celebrated at night.

November 11, 2023 (Sat), Veteran's Day, No School November 10, 2023 (Fri)

November 12, 2023 (Sun), Diwali, Hindu

November 23, 2023 (Thur), Thanksgiving Day, No school November 23-24, 2023 (Thurs-Fri)

December 7-15, 2023 (Thu-Fri), Hanukkah (Chanukah), Jewish

December 25, 2023 (Mon), Christmas Day, Christian, No school

January 1, 2023 (Mon), New Year's Day, No school

January 7-8, 2024 (Sun-Mon), Orthodox Christmas, Christian Orthodox

January 15, 2024 (Mon), Martin Luther King Day, No school

February 10, 2024 (Sat), Lunar New Year

February 14, 2024 (Wed), Ash Wednesday, Christian

February 14, 2024 (Wed), Beginning of Lent, Christian, Observed February 14-March 28, 2024

February 19, 2024 (Mon), President's Day, No school

March 8, 2024 (Fri), Maha Shivaratri, Hindu

March 10, 2024 (Sun), Beginning of Ramadan, Observed March 10-April 10, 2024

March 23-24, 2024 (Sat-Sun), Purim, Jewish

March 25, 2024 (Mon), Holi, Hindu

March 29, 2024 (Fri), Good Friday, Christian

March 31, 2024 (Sun), Easter, Christian

April 6, 2024 (Sun), Lailat Ul Qadr, Islamic, Date not fixed, See note above.

April 10, 2024 (Wed), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Islamic, Observed March 10-April 10, 2024

April 17, 2024 (Wed), Ram Navami, Hindu

April 22-30, 2024 (Mon-week after following Tues), Jewish, No work permitted on April 23-24 and April 29-30. Work is permitted only on April 25-26 and April 28 with certain restrictions.

May 3, 2024 (Fri), Orthodox Good Friday, Christian Orthodox

May 5, 2024 (Sun), Orthodox Easter, Christian Orthodox

May 27, 2024 (Mon), Memorial Day, No school

June 11-13, 2024 (Tue-Thurs), *Shavuot, Jewish, Designated non-work day for observers

June 16-17, 2024 (Sun-Mon), Eid al-Adha, Islamic, Date not fixed. See note above.

July 4, 2024 (Thurs), Independence Day, No school

August 26, 2024 (Mon), Janmashtami, Hindu, Date not fixed, See note above.