

DRAFT Proposal

Including a statement about Religious Holidays in the Student Handbook

Rationale:

- Dr. Nolin initiated a desire for our committee to ensure that our school calendar reflects our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - We have worked hard to research and understand how to address this in Natick.
- We've communicated clearly to students and families that while we are committed to making some kind of change to our calendar, the target date for that decision is the 2023-2024 school year.
- Families indicated that homework and tests continue to be held on major holidays and asked us to consider making a "first step" change to the coming school year.
- Looking at Westborough/Brookline example that we have been using as a template this year and I don't believe that they are official School Committee Policies - I may be wrong but I can't find them in their policy manuals.
- The link shared with our committee at [a meeting in December of 2020](#) shows Westborough's as a calendar decision made by the School Committee.
- As such, this document serves as a way to step back from an official calendar policy, and into the first ask parents of students in especially minority religious communities are asking we consider: finding a way to make a promise to our students and families that that we will honor cultural and religious observances while also supporting our faculty and staff and their desire to grow in awareness and knowledge of the diversity of our students.

Proposal: Add the following item to our [Student Handbook page 37](#) - **under Teacher Responsibility:**

"Refrain from administering a test, project completion or assign homework due on or the day after a significant* Religious Holiday within a student's religious/cultural tradition. If the holiday falls on a Saturday, it is strongly encouraged for work to be due or tests administered on the following Tuesday."

*Significant Religious Holiday identified by the Natick Public School Committee are as follows

January:

Christmas (Orthodox)

Lunar New Year

April:

Good Friday and Easter (Roman)

Good Friday and Easter (Orthodox)

Eid-Al-Fitr

Passover (First and Last day) (Wednesday April 5th, Thursday April 13th, 2023)

September:

Rosh Hasanah

Yom Kipur*

November:

Diwali

December:

Christmas

Kwanzaa

*Religious Holidays often vary from year to year because most follow a lunar calendar. The School District will be responsible for providing teachers and staff with a calendar listing the specific dates of the significant religious holidays within that school year in August every year.

Athletics and Fine Arts:

Our athletic and fine arts programs are also sensitive to these issues. Coaches and fine arts instructors are advised of and sensitive to the religious and cultural needs of their students and families. There will be no athletic or fine arts consequence for missing games/performances and/or practices due to religious observances.

Summary:

This proposal is a slight adjustment and perhaps a stronger clarification of what our administration has already asked of our teachers. By placing it in the student handbook, we make it clear to families what the expectations of staff are and the district will support the staff in a growing awareness of these holidays.

This does not suggest that no Homework or tests can be administered on these days - but for students who celebrate the specific holiday - he/she/they would be exempt. This would provide students with potentially 1-4 days of sensitivity around a religious Holiday celebration.

I understand there is some concern that we have not built enough stakeholder buy-in, especially with the teachers, but I argue that the professional development focus on DEI awareness this year and the already stated expectation from principals, this foundation for this kind of adjustment in our homework policy has been laid.

***** IF WE WANT TO TAKE IT FURTHER *****

We have received recommendations by religious leaders and families within the district to include other important Holidays in our sensitivity training and outreach. If we did wanted to add another layer of holidays, these are the ones that have been suggested:

February:

Ash Wednesday (Roman) (Fr. Hines)

March:

Orthodox (Othodox)

Holi* (including this at the Recommendation of Dr. Preeta Banerjee)

Purim (including this at the recommendation of Farrah Rubenstein)

May:

Shavuot (First and Last) (including this at the recommendation of Farrah Rubenstein)

September:

Sukkot

October:

Navratri and Durga Puja* (including this at the Recommendation of Dr. Preeta Banerjee)

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Homework Policy

The Natick Public School System believes that homework contributes to the understanding of the curriculum and reinforces learning. Homework is a meaningful extension of daily classroom activities. Homework provides for practice of skills and application of principles based upon work begun in the classroom. It enriches school experiences and promotes a permanent interest in learning. It stimulates individual initiative, personal responsibility, and self-direction. Due to the differences in age levels, learning styles, and modes of instruction in the elementary and the secondary schools, homework expectations will necessarily differ.

Teacher Responsibilities:

1. Assign homework that is meaningful and useful;
2. Allow time for students' questions to clarify directions;
3. Respond to each assignment by a grade and/or a comment within a reasonable length of time;
4. Provide opportunities for both short-term and long-term assignments;
5. Monitor long-term assignments in order to avoid last-minute student efforts;
6. Limit assigning homework over school vacations;
7. Inform parents of their role in supervising homework;
8. Communicate with pupil and parent when problems arise.
- 9. Refrain from administering a test, project completion or assign homework due for a student on or the day after a significant* Religious Holiday within that student's religious/cultural tradition. If the holiday falls on a Saturday, it is encouraged for work to be due on the following Tuesday.**

Bolded item is the proposal I am suggesting that we add

Respectfully submitted by Catherine Brunell
April 26, 2022

DRAFT/Proposal