

ACCOMODATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC OBSERVANCES

The Reading School District serves children from many different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Since the American tradition requires respect for religious diversity and upholds freedom of religion and equality before the law, it shall be the Policy of the Town of Reading School District, out of respect for family values and our different religious and ethnic traditions, that:

- 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;
- Teachers, coaches, and advisors shall refrain from teaching difficult to make-up material, scheduling exam preparation, tests, quizzes, homework, as well as, scheduling other one-time events (field trips, athletic events, music performances, theatre plays and productions, auditions, and back to school functions), on major non-national religious holidays.
 - Major non-national religious holidays will be identified as two days of Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Passover, Yom Kippur (which all begin at sundown the night before), and Good Friday.
 - The Superintendent of Schools will identify 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.
 - Long-term and group assignments will not be due the day of or the day after a major non-national religious holiday.
 - Any materials needed for make-up such as movies or media, should be easily and flexibly accessible within a reasonably determined time frame.
 - The policy should not prevent coaches and advisors from holding practices or rehearsals for these events 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.
- The first day of the school year shall not be scheduled on a major non-national religious holiday.
- Administrators, teachers, coaches, booster groups, PTOs and advisors shall refrain from scheduling parent, student or school community events on major non-national religious holidays.
- Students are entitled to miss school and extra-curricular activities, to participate in celebrations of their families' major religious and ethnic holidays and therefore will not be penalized in any way;
- All students are entitled to individual accommodations which allow them to participate in their family religious or ethnic observances without detriment to their education or grades, including;

- Extensions of due dates on assigned work (at a minimum the extension should be the number of days absent plus one additional day)
- Opportunities to make up material missed in class, and
- Reasonable accommodations as may be appropriate.

District policy prohibits discrimination against any student, employee, or other individual because of such individual's religious/ethnic belief or practice, or any absence thereof. Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 151C, Section 2B provides, in part, that;

- 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;
- 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;
- Any absence because of religious or ethnic holiday must be recorded in the school register or in any group or class attendance record as an excused absence for religious observance;
- Such absence must NOT be recorded on any transcript or application or employment form or on any similar form;
- To be entitled to the privileges set forth above, the pupil must present to the principal a written excuse signed by a parent or person standing in place of a parent at least 24 hours in advance.

For the aforementioned holidays as well as 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.

Approved by Reading School Committee on January 13, 2014.

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