

110 CORNING ROAD, SUITE #1804
CROSSROADS II
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA 27518

PHONE: 919.694.0524

FAX: 919.431.7776

E-MAIL: RTRICE@WCPSS.NET

MEMORANDUM

To: School Principals
From: Dr. Rodney N. Trice 
Assistant Superintendent for Equity Affairs
Date: September 27, 2016
Subject: Observance of Religious Holidays

An important quality of the Wake County Public School System is our diversity. The fifth core value of Vision 2020 states that “[we] value a diverse school community that is inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive.” This diversity is part of what makes our school system such an amazing place to teach and learn.

Accommodating students, their families, and staff who celebrate religious holidays not already incorporated in the official school calendar, requires understanding and thoughtfulness of the significance of religious holidays by those observing.

So in this spirit, school leaders should make every reasonable effort to ensure observers of religious holidays are not penalized for missing exams, class work, homework assignments, band practices, tryouts, athletic competitions, or other co-curricular activities scheduled during these absences. If examinations must be given during religious holidays, make-up exams or other procedures should be established to provide an opportunity to complete any missed work. School leaders are also strongly encouraged to work with individual students, families, and staff to support their religious practices beyond the accommodations described above.

To assist school leaders in planning activities for students and staff, provided below is an annotated calendar of major religious holidays that may prove useful in responding to requests for absence. This information was verified using the National School Public Relations Association *Resources for Planning the School Calendar 2016-2017* and the Interfaith Calendar for World Religions found at interfaithcalendar.org.

Please direct any question regarding observance of religious holidays to Dr. Rodney N. Trice in the Office of Equity Affairs at rtrice@wcpss.net or 919.694.0524.

cc: Dr. James Merrill, Superintendent
Dr. Marvin Connelly, Chief of Staff and Strategic Planning
Cathy Moore, Deputy Superintendent for Academic Advancement
David Neter, Chief Operating Officer
Tim Simmons, Chief of Communications
Area Superintendents

Jewish Religious Holidays and Recommended Accommodations	Date(s) Observed
<p>Rosh Hashanah—* begins at sundown (Jewish) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>Start of the Jewish New Year, day of judgment and remembrance; the Jewish calendar celebrates the New Year in the seventh month (Tishrei) as a day of rest and celebration ten days before Yom Kippur</p> <p>General Practices: Prayer in synagogue and festive meals</p> <p>Date details: Begins at sundown.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date.</p>	<p>*Oct. 2-4, 2016 *Sept. 20-22, 2017 *Sept. 9-11, 2018</p>
<p>Yom Kippur—*begins at sundown (Jewish) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>Yom Kippur is often considered the holiest day of the year for Jews, and the day is dedicated to atonement and abstinence.</p> <p>General Practices: During Yom Kippur, Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset, and light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the night of Yom Kippur.</p> <p>Date details: Begins at sundown.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date and after a day of fasting.</p>	<p>*Oct. 11-12, 2016 *Sept. 29-30, 2017 *Sept. 18-19, 2018</p>
<p>Sukkot—*begins at sundown (Jewish) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>A week-long celebration which begins with the building of Sukkah for sleep and meals; Sukkot is named for the huts Moses and the Israelites lived in as they wandered the desert before reaching the promised land.</p> <p>General Practices: Families in the United States commonly decorate the sukkah with produce and artwork.</p> <p>Date details: Begins at sundown. Work holiday varies by denomination.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on the first two days.</p>	<p>*Oct. 16-17, 2016 *Oct. 4-5, 2017 *Sept. 23-24, 2018</p>

Shemini Atzeret –*begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Also known as Atzereth, this is a fall festival, which includes a memorial service for the dead and features prayers for rain in Israel.

General Practices: Jews light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on Shemini Atzereth (the 8th night of Sukkot).

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date.

*Oct. 23-24, 2016
*Oct. 11-12, 2017
*Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2018

Simchat Torah –*begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Simchat Torah marks the completion of the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue and the beginning of the new cycle.

General Practices: Practitioners dance in synagogues as all the Torah scrolls are carried around in seven circuits.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date.

*Oct. 24-25, 2016
*Oct. 12-13, 2017
*Oct. 1-2, 2018

Hanukkah / Chanukah –*begins at sundown (Jewish)

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights, and lasts for eight days. Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish struggle for religious freedom. The history of the holiday involves a historic military victory in which a Jewish sect called the Maccabees defeated the Syrian Greeks. The celebration commemorates a miracle in which a sacred temple flame burned for eight days on only one day's worth of oil.

General Practices: On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate with food and song, as well as exchanging gifts for eight days.

Date details: Hanukkah begins at sundown on the first day.

Recommended Accommodations: Academics and work permitted, not a work holiday.

*Dec. 24-Jan. 1, 2016
*Dec. 12-20, 2017
*Dec. 2-10, 2018

Pesach / Passover –*begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Pesach is a week-long observance commemorating the freedom and exodus of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses II (one of three pilgrimage festivals).

General Practices: Family gatherings, ritualized meals called Seders, reading of the Haggadah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the last night of Passover.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on the first two and last two days of the holiday.

Shavuot –*begins at sundown (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Commemorates receipt of the Torah on Mount Sinai (two of three pilgrimage festivals)

General Practices: Evening of devotional programs and studying the Torah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the second night of Shavuot.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on the first two and last two days of the holiday.

*April 10–18, 2017

*Mar. 30–April 7, 2018

*May 30–June 1, 2017

*May 19–21, 2018

Islamic Religious Holidays and Recommended Accommodations	Date(s) Observed
<p>Eid al-Adha—*begins at sundown (Islamic) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>Eid al-Adha is a major festival that celebrates the willingness to make sacrifices in the name of one’s faith. According to legend, the prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son in God’s name. When Ibrahim was prepared to kill his son, God stepped in and gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead. This holiday celebrates Ibrahim’s total faith in God, and Muslims view this holiday as an important annual reminder.</p> <p>General Practices: Prayers, gift giving, prayers, and sometimes slaughtering of sheep, with a portion of the meat gifted to the poor.</p> <p>Date details: Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. Begins at sundown.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on the first day.</p>	<p>*Sept. 12-13, 2016 *Aug. 31-Sept. 1, 2017 *Aug. 21-22, 2018</p>
<p>Ramadan—*begins at sundown (Islamic)</p> <p>Ramadan is an occasion to focus on faith through fasting and prayer, and is one of the most important Muslim holidays. Ramadan is notable because the Qur’an was first revealed during this month, and Muslims see the Qur’an as the ultimate form of guidance for mankind. The night that the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad is called Lailat ul Oadr, and standing in prayer this one night is thought to eclipse months of worship.</p> <p>General Practices: Fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims refrain from food and beverages during the daylight hours, and smoking and sexual relations are forbidden. Worshipers break the fasting each night with prayer, reading of the Qu’ran, and a meal called the iftar. In addition, many Muslims also attend night prayers at Mosques. Muslims also believe that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than any other time of the year, so almost all Muslims try to give up bad habits during Ramadan.</p> <p>Date Details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. The observed date marks the beginning of a 30-day observation.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: If possible, avoid scheduling major academic deadlines during this time. Be sensitive to the fact that students and employees celebrating Ramadan will be fasting during the day (continuously for 30 days) and will likely have less stamina as a result.</p>	<p>*June 5-July 5, 2016 *May 26-June 25, 2017 *May 15-June 14, 2018</p>

Eid al-Fitr –*begins at sundown (Islamic)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Eid al-Fitr means "break the fast", and is the last day of Ramadan, marking the end of a month of fasting.

General Practices: Muslims often pray, exchange gifts, give money to children, feast, and celebrate with friends and family.

Date Details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. Eid al Fitr is a three day celebration and begins at sundown.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, or activities on this date. Employees will likely ask to take a vacation day on this day, and that request should be granted if at all possible.

*July 4-5, 2016

*June 24-25, 2017

*June 14-15, 2018

Hindu Religious Holiday and Recommended Accommodations	Date(s) Observed
<p data-bbox="61 138 535 170">Diwali (Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain)</p> <p data-bbox="61 180 532 212">Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p data-bbox="61 254 1227 464">Diwali—the Hindu “festival of lights”—is an extremely popular holiday for multiple religions throughout Southern Asia. Diwali extends over five days, and celebrates the victory of good over evil. The Times of India described Diwali as “a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple.” Fireworks, oil lamps, and sweets are common, making this a favorite holiday for children. The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people’s homes.</p> <p data-bbox="61 506 1058 537">General Practices: Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.</p> <p data-bbox="61 579 1222 642">Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events, and activities on this date. Hindu employees will likely request a vacation day on this date.</p>	<p data-bbox="1255 138 1419 170">Oct. 30, 2016</p> <p data-bbox="1255 180 1419 212">Oct. 19, 2017</p> <p data-bbox="1255 222 1409 254">Nov. 7, 2018</p>

Christian Religious Holidays and Recommended Accommodations	Date(s) Observed
<p>Christmas –*begins at sundown (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.</p> <p>General Practices: Many celebrate this holiday by giving gifts, attending church services, decorating Christmas trees, and visiting family.</p> <p>Date details: Begins at sundown on Dec. 24 annually and continues with all day celebration on Dec. 25.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: This is a national holiday in the United States, so special accommodations are likely not required.</p>	<p>*Dec. 24-25, 2016 *Dec. 24-25, 2017 *Dec. 24-25, 2018</p>
<p>Christmas (Eastern Orthodox Christian) Holiday with significant work restriction</p> <p>Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.</p> <p>General Practices: Many celebrate this holiday by attending church services, holding celebratory meals, and visiting family.</p> <p>Date details: Eastern Orthodox Christmas is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Because this holiday typically falls during winter break, academic accommodations may not be required. However many Eastern Orthodox employees will probably request this day off.</p>	<p>Jan. 7, 2017 Jan. 7, 2018</p>
<p>Good Friday (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)</p> <p>Friday before Easter, commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; among some sects of Christianity and in many countries marks a day of fasting.</p> <p>General Practices: Prayer, fasting, and noon or afternoon services in some Christian denominations.</p> <p>Date details: Always falls on the Friday before Easter Sunday.</p> <p>Recommended Accommodations: Some employees may request this day off.</p>	<p>April 14, 2017 March 30, 2018</p>

Easter (Christian / Roman Catholic and Protestant)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

General Practices: Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs, baskets and chocolate bunnies. It is a celebration of renewal.

Date details: Easter Sunday is determined by the Gregorian calendar (Gregorian calendar regulates ceremonial cycle of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches).

April 16, 2017

April 1, 2018

Holy Friday / Good Friday (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Friday before Easter, commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; among some sects of Christianity and in many countries marks a day of fasting.

General Practices: Prayer, fasting, confession, and church services as well as the wrapping or dyeing of eggs (often red) in preparation for Easter Sunday.

Date details: Orthodox Good Friday is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Recommended Accommodations: Avoid scheduling important academic deadlines, events and activities on the date.

April 14, 2017

April 6, 2018

Pascha / Easter (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

General Practices: Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs and baskets of breads, meats, eggs, cheeses and other foods. It is a celebration of renewal.

Date details: Easter Sunday is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

April 16, 2017

April 8, 2018