



Office of the Superintendent

To: Newton School Committee
From: Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Date: December 18, 2023
Re: Calendar Proposal and Homework/Holiday Companion Policy Introduction and Handling
Presidential Election Day 2024

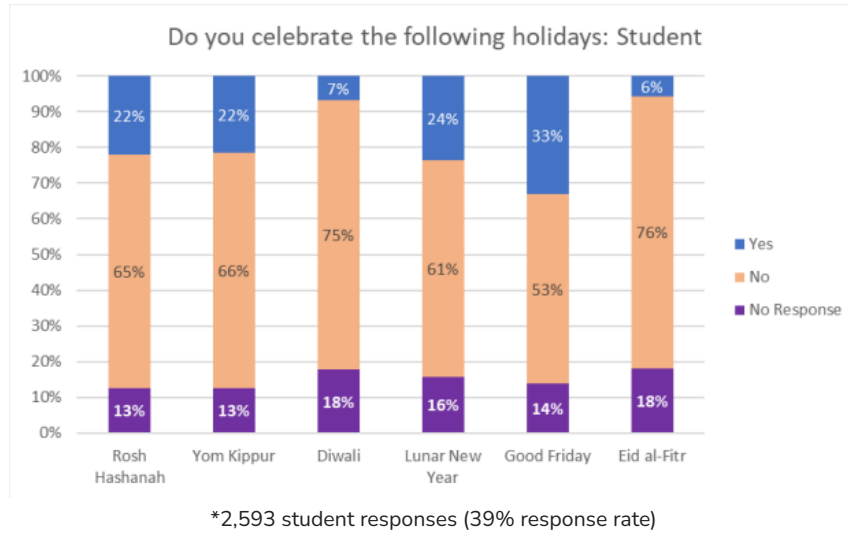
Please note that this memo was reviewed by student and staff advisory groups, principals, and central office staff prior to being presented to the school committee for referral to the policy sub committee.

Calendar Working Group (CWG)

In the 2022-23 school year, Interim Superintendent, Kathy Smith, created a calendar working group (CWG). The committee shared important community experience data and did come to several recommendations—most prominently that NPS must have consistent policy and practices across buildings as to how current "recognized observance" holidays are managed. Here you can read the full [CWG report](#) and the [executive summary of the report](#) (both documents, June 2023). Currently, schools are using different strategies to manage work that may be assigned (including homework), whether tests can be administered, and what events can be scheduled on certain days within the district. I offer the following recommendations at the request of the school committee as a first step in increasing equity, unity and consistency of practice across the district—tailoring our observances and practices to the lived observances of our population.

Value of Holidays

The CWG report indicated a general sense of the importance of recognizing important holidays celebrated by the current community, and respecting those that celebrate them. This broadly fits into the NPS culture of inclusivity and celebrating diversity. We have a diverse student population when it comes to religious and cultural celebrations:



Length of Year

The CWG and committee further recognized the challenge of fitting in 180 days of school, adjusting for snow days and adding more holidays—all before June 30 of each year, while noting that many families and staff do not want the school year to stretch into the last week of June. However, as an exercise, a hypothetical projection was conducted of adding all holidays listed in the survey as observed holidays: Lunar New Year, keeping two Jewish holidays, Diwali, Eid-al-Fitr and the current December holidays. This projection indicated that school would be pushed into the end of June in only one year within the next decade (assuming five snow days also occurring). The list of holidays in the survey included all of the holidays (both recognized and observed) on the NPS calendar in the 2022-2023 school year (not including federal holidays).

Childcare

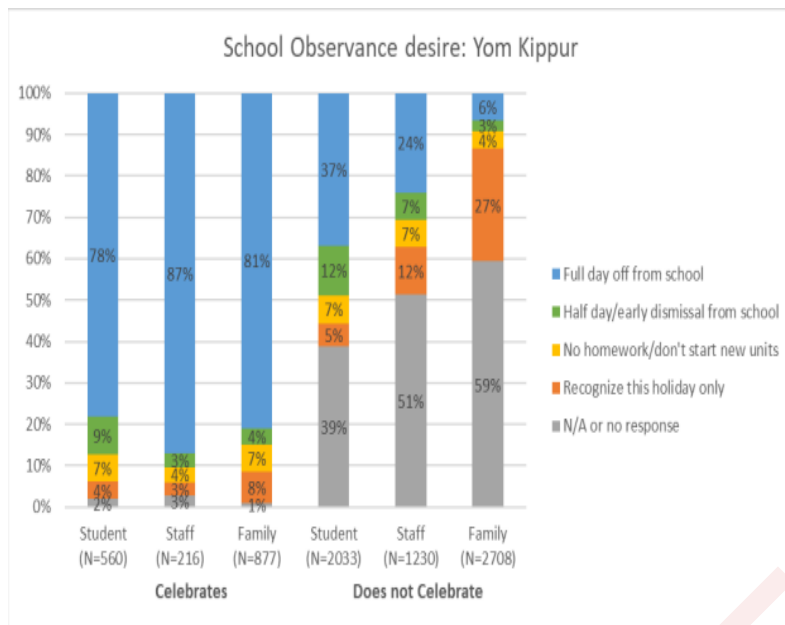
An important consideration for adding holidays to the calendar is childcare for working families when NPS is closed and many businesses are open. School holidays and closures most acutely affect all caregivers who work during the day and must pay for childcare.

The Committee Must Decide How It Handles Holidays

School districts have taken different approaches to the creation of calendars and recognition of holidays. Some only recognize federal holidays (this gives Christian holidays the privilege of major holidays and does not prioritize other religions). Some districts create calendars that include every major religion. Some strike a balance. Information gleaned through both the survey conducted by the CWG and interviews with people who celebrate holidays, revealed the holidays that are most celebrated in the Newton community. Those who celebrate these holidays want the day off to connect with family and worship.

The CWG survey indicated the following:

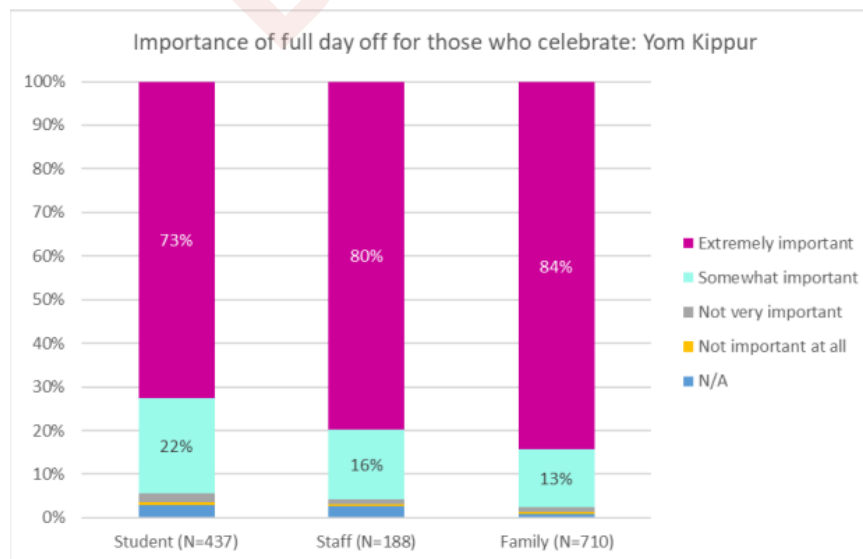
- For those who celebrate any of the holidays on the survey, a strong majority prefers that there is a day off school to celebrate that holiday



- For those who celebrate any of the holidays listed, there was a similar intensity of the importance of having a day off - with >90% of respondents saying it was extremely/somewhat important (there was more variability between the extremely and somewhat categories, where ~60% responded extremely for Good Friday versus >70% for all other holidays).

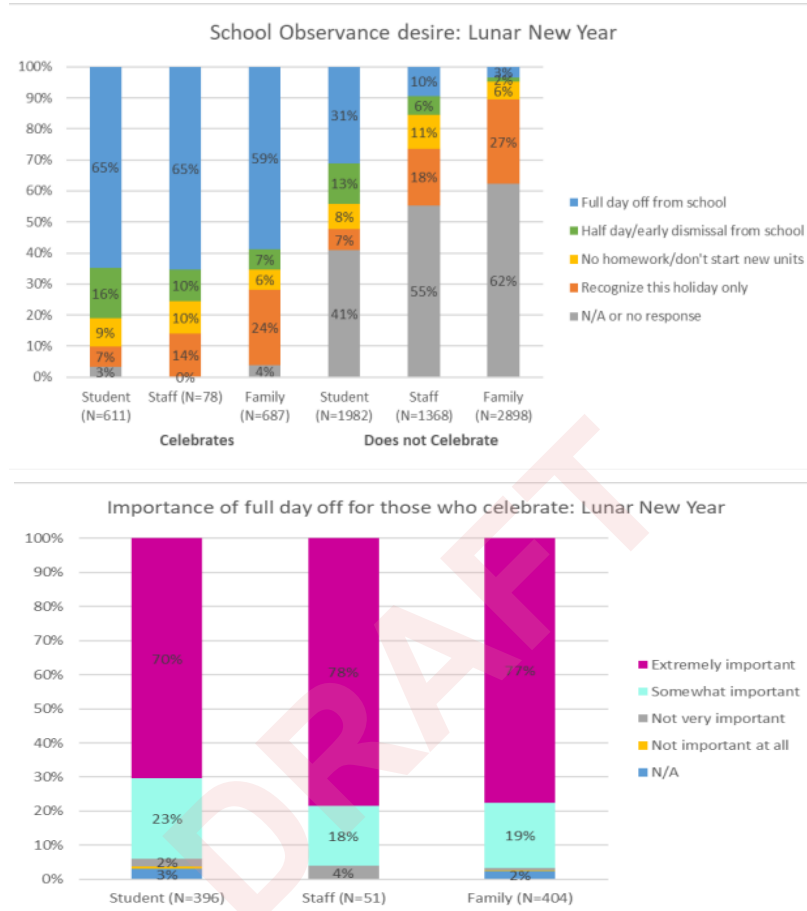
Thus, people seem to indicate that if they celebrate these holidays, having a day off is important.

Currently, NPS closes the district for two Jewish holidays with ~22% of students and ~15% of staff celebrating. Using Yom Kippur as an example, 78% of responding students and 87% of responding staff who celebrate this holiday want the day off from school, and 95% of responding students and 96% of responding staff deem it important to them:



A similarly sized cohort of students celebrate Lunar New Year at 24% and the Jewish holidays at 22% (though notably for staff, only 5% celebrate Lunar New Year while 15% celebrate the

Jewish holidays–this possibly reflects more about the lack of diversity within our staff). For those who celebrate Lunar New Year, 65% of both responding students and staff want a full day off from school, and 93% of responding students and 96% of responding staff deem it important to them:



Superintendent Recommendation #1: From a data-driven perspective then, the district should also offer a schools-closed holiday for Lunar New Year.

The data about Jewish Holidays and Lunar New Year are very similar, and therefore, as an institution, NPS has, by our current practice, stated that having 20% of the student population celebrate a holiday, with a strong preference for having that day off, creates critical mass to do so. Therefore, it is my recommendation that NPS moves forward with creating a district-wide holiday for Lunar New Year based on this data.

On Belonging and Welcoming Diversity within Our Schools

The more difficult question for the committee lies in this area of discussion. What we honor on the calendar and in schedules signals messages to our community about what is valued and prioritized.

As an increasingly diverse city and school population, we must consider the future cultural diversity of our residents and students, and honor the smaller but equally cherished

populations and traditions within the city. This brings us to a discussion about how to recognize Diwali and Eid al-Fitr.

For each of the two holidays, 6-7% of the responding student population, and 1-2% of the responding staff population observe this holiday. It does not, from a critical mass/data perspective, seem to warrant days off from schools, but, to live our values of encouraging belonging and valuing diversity, we should honor the holidays by naming them as days of accommodation/recognized holidays within the system. As mentioned at the open, those accommodations should be embedded in policy and may include everything from homework limitations, assignments being due, a testing policy, excused absence status on recognized days of obligation, and extracurricular events not being held on those high holidays coupled with students not being penalized or missing playing time for observing holidays and missing practices.

Here is a DRAFT of 2 possible proposed calendars for consideration by the Committee: [2024-25 Draft Calendar](#). I ask for your support to enact the new holiday observance (day off) and recognitions in the calendar and the below related policies. The calendar indicates holidays for which school is not in session AND recognized holidays that should be considered as part of the homework policies proposed below (those holidays listed that are starred and noted in red are recognized holidays).

A secondary part of the calendar proposal deals with addressing the committee's concern that while the current teacher contract pays staff for 185 days of work, only 183 are worked. The current staff contracts allow the committee to add two additional student days to the calendar within the current staff pay/contract. This would lengthen the school year for students and staff by two days.

However, an alternative proposal is the one I endorse, as it serves to address requests from staff that came through as a theme in my entry planning work (need for substantive professional development) and from parents/staff/principals (safety).

Election Day, November 5, 2024

I propose to the committee that given the magnitude of voting on a presidential election year and the increased worries we have about school safety on these days, that November 5, 2024 be a day where no students report to school. Instead, we will run a full day of professional development for staff on this day. As a trade for this day, the district will not schedule the 181st and 182nd student days noted as possible in the teachers' contract. In short, staff would gain a full day of professional development on election day, and be given an additional day off from their current contract expected number of service days (185). The full length of the staff year would be 184 days (currently 185).

This proposal makes election day 2024 a safe day off of school for students, and would allow staff to vote in their hometowns in the a.m., and attend a full day of professional development sessions held at our high schools (non-voting locations). This ensures safety on what might

prove to be a hard day for safety in the city, AND would allow us the chance to give staff personalized in-house professional development days with contracted PD provided.

Hosting such a day mid-year saves a good deal of money in substitutes, sending staff to workshops, travel expenses, and would allow us to pay staff who wanted to present and to bring in contracted PD. We could, as many other districts do, also allow other districts to pay to participate in these trainings, thus adding revenue for the district. Finally, other city staff could participate in our trainings—from CPR, to equity and hiring training sessions, to trauma informed care, or even workshops on dealing with the public—we could have a day of collaboration with our city colleagues.

ACTION: The committee will have to decide which calendar they would like to endorse.

Superintendent Recommendation #3: Every 5-7 years, the calendar working group should review any changes to the city census/population data and resend a check in survey to determine if the city’s religious demographics have shifted and therefore dictate if a revision to the calendar should again be made.

Superintendent Recommendation #2: I propose the following two policies and the above draft calendar to model how we might operationalize a more inclusive holiday recognition system that manages and mitigates district expectations on students around holiday observances.

ACTION: vote policy implementation in tandem with the calendar recommendations. Committee may vote in any configuration of the calendar, and could vote to reject my recommendation on Lunar New Year and still adopt the policies below. You may also reject all of it in full.

DRAFT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS—First Read

OBSERVANCES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS-JHA

Personal Observances of Religious Holidays

The Newton Public Schools shall excuse students from school attendance and extra-curricular activities for personal observances of religious holidays occurring on dates when school is in session. Students will not be penalized for such absences.

When students miss assignments, tests or other school work due to such excused absences, they shall be provided a reasonable opportunity to make up their schoolwork in a timely manner.

The above paragraphs will pertain to all personal religious observances, regardless of inclusion of major religious observances on the school calendar.

Recognized Religious Observances Identified on Districtwide Calendar

Major religious observances where school is in session and where school is closed shall be identified in the Newton Public Schools calendar as voted by the Newton School Committee.

No major assignments or assessments will be due for any student during any identified major religious observance, including the day following such observance.

Guidelines for religious observances will be published in each school's student handbook.

Students or their parents are encouraged to communicate with teachers in advance of such absences.

No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because they have availed themselves of the provisions of this policy.

Adopted by the Newton School Committee on xxxxxx

Homework Policy-IKB

The Newton Public Schools 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 secondary schools, homework expectations will necessarily differ. Guidelines for homework will be published in the student handbooks.

No homework will be due during any major religious observance (see policy JHA for the definition of "recognized religious observances as identified on district approved calendar") including the day following such an observance for elementary and middle school students and for the high school level, will not be due unless the student has had 30 out of school hours, after the holiday day has ended, to complete assignment(s), projects or study for assessments.

Such observances shall be identified in the Newton Public Schools calendar as voted by the Newton School Committee

Principals may promulgate school-based rules regarding homework that are consistent with this policy.

Cross Reference IC/ICA; JHS

Adopted by the Newton School Committee, XXXXXXX

Table Of Holiday Impact through 2044

School Year	Rosh Hashanah		Yom Kippur		Diwali		Lunar New Year		Eid al-Fitr		Good Friday		Total School Days			
	Date	Day of week	Date	Day of week	Date	Day of week	Date	Day of week	Date	Day of week	Date	Day of week	Observed Holidays	Recognized Holidays	Total	Notes
2024-25	10/3/2024	Thu	10/12/2024	Sat	11/1/2024	Fri	1/29/2025	Wed	3/30/2025	Sun	4/18/2025	Fri	2	2	4	
2025-26	9/23/2025	Tue	10/2/2025	Thu	10/21/2025	Tue	2/17/2026	Tue	3/20/2026	Fri	4/3/2026	Fri	3	2	5	
2026-27	9/12/2026	Sat	9/21/2026	Mon	11/8/2026	Sun	2/6/2027	Sat	3/9/2027	Tue	3/26/2027	Fri	2	1	3	
2027-28	10/2/2027	Sat	10/11/2027	Mon	10/29/2027	Fri	1/26/2028	Wed	2/26/2028	Sat	4/14/2028	Fri	1	2	3	
2028-29	9/21/2028	Thu	9/30/2028	Sun	10/17/2028	Tue	2/13/2029	Tue	2/14/2029	Wed	4/30/2029	Fri	2	3	5	
2029-30	9/10/2029	Mon	9/19/2029	Wed	11/5/2029	Mon	2/3/2030	Sun	2/4/2030	Mon	4/19/2030	Fri	2	2	4	
2030-31	9/28/2030	Sat	10/7/2030	Mon	10/26/2030	Sat	1/23/2031	Thu	1/24/2031	Fri	4/11/2031	Fri	2	2	4	
2031-32	9/18/2031	Thu	9/27/2031	Sat	11/14/2031	Fri	2/11/2032	Wed	1/14/2032	Wed	3/25/2032	Fri	2	3	5	
2032-33	9/6/2032	Mon	9/15/2032	Wed	11/2/2032	Tue	1/31/2033	Mon	1/2/2033	Sun	4/15/2033	Fri	2	2	4	
2033-34	9/24/2033	Sat	10/3/2033	Mon	10/22/2033	Sat	2/19/2034	Sun	12/23/2033	Fri	4/7/2034	Fri	2	1	3	
2034-35	9/14/2034	Thu	9/23/2034	Sat	11/10/2034	Fri	2/8/2035	Thu	12/12/2034	Tue	3/23/2035	Fri	2	2	4	
2035-36	10/4/2035	Thu	10/13/2035	Sat	10/30/2035	Tue	1/28/2036	Mon	12/1/2035	Sat	4/11/2036	Fri	2	2	4	
2036-37	9/22/2036	Mon	10/1/2036	Wed	10/19/2036	Sun	2/15/2037	Sun	11/19/2036	Wed	4/3/2037	Fri	3	1	4	
2037-38	9/10/2037	Thu	9/19/2037	Sat	11/7/2037	Sat	2/4/2038	Thu	11/8/2037	Sun	4/23/2038	Fri	1	1	2	
2038-39	9/30/2038	Thu	10/9/2038	Sat	10/27/2038	Wed	1/24/2039	Mon	10/29/2038	Fri	4/8/2039	Fri	2	3	5	
2039-40	9/19/2039	Mon	9/28/2039	Wed	10/17/2039	Mon	2/12/2040	Sun	10/19/2039	Wed	3/30/2040	Fri	3	2	5	
2040-41	9/8/2040	Sat	9/17/2040	Mon	11/4/2040	Sun	2/1/2041	Fri	10/7/2040	Sun	4/19/2041	Fri	1	1	2	
2041-42	9/26/2041	Thu	10/5/2041	Sat	10/24/2041	Thu	1/22/2042	Wed	9/26/2041	Thu	4/4/2042	Fri	2	3	4	*Rosh Hashanah and Eid on same day
2042-43	9/15/2042	Mon	9/24/2042	Wed	11/12/2042	Wed	2/10/2043	Tue	9/15/2042	Mon	3/27/2043	Fri	3	3	5	*Rosh Hashanah and Eid on same day
2043-44	10/5/2043	Mon	10/14/2043	Wed	11/1/2043	Sun	1/30/2044	Sat	9/4/2043	Fri	4/15/2044	Fri	3	1	3	*Eid before Labor Day