



Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools

Religious Holidays in the School calendar

THURSDAY

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 6:03 PM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Dear Dr. Mills and School Committee Members:

I am writing today to express my concern and dismay over the ongoing debate regarding the three religious holidays and their place in the school calendar. I will not restate the cogent and salient points made by others but just say that I am in complete agreement with all arguments to maintain these days as "no school" days. I feel the main point that remains the central focus of this debate is the issue of the manner in which these holidays are observed. Although I am not Catholic, my friends have shared with me that Good Friday is a solemn day spent in reflection and prayer and the day off from school doesn't force them to have to make the difficult choice of missing school or abandoning their beliefs.

Similarly, the statements expressed in other letters you have received are absolutely accurate. The High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are solemn holidays with much of the day spent in synagogue in prayer. These holidays are set and cannot be celebrated at any other time. As a country we have moved/merged holidays that make the calendar easier for employers and schools (President's Day) but other holidays cannot be changed. Christmas is December 25th without fail and those who are Christian have the fortune to have a school vacation guaranteed so they may worship with their families. Similarly, midnight mass is at midnight where there are no other conflicts or difficult choices to be made. The holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur follow the same pattern except that our worship takes place during the morning, early afternoon, late afternoon and early evening. In addition, on Yom Kippur teens over the age of 13 are fasting for 24 hours. For the sake of clarity, fasting on this holiday means no food or drink (not even water) and many children (like my own) do not write or use electronics (like a computer) in the observance of the most holy day in the Jewish calendar. Having the stress of choosing school or worship on the holiest days of the year is a difficult choice that shouldn't have to be made.

One point that hasn't been made is that these two holidays follow the Jewish calendar which is different than the secular calendar. As a result these two holidays "float" around between September and October and can often fall all or partially on the weekend. As a result the debate about two missed school days is not valid for every year and I am concerned that we have to go through the process anew every few years. I thank you for considering the points in my letter and I will be in attendance at the meeting to lend my voice and support to maintaining these holidays.

Respectfully


acton@acton-ma.gov

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Good Friday Holidays

1 message

"com">

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 4:57 PM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

December 4, 2012

Dear Acton School Committee and Acton/Boxborough Regional School Committee:

As a resident of Boxborough with previously two children in the school system who have now graduated, I feel compelled to voice my strong disagreement regarding the proposal to eliminate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Good Friday as holidays in the school calendar.

It saddens and disappoints me that the School Committee is proposing to eliminate holidays from the school calendar that are extremely important to the overwhelming majority of individuals residing in both Acton and Boxborough. In an era of greater diversity and increased cultural awareness, it appears anachronistic to send the message that these important religious events are no longer respected, valued, or appreciated by our community. Eliminating these holidays also raises the suspicion that it is someone's "hidden agenda" to quell the community's respect for these holidays...even if the best intentioned arguments and explanations are voiced by the School Committee. It is indeed a legislative slap-in-the-face.

It is important to understand that the nature and importance of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Good Friday are enormous to the Jewish and Christian religions (as is Christmas, which is also a school holiday). For the Jewish faith, Rosh Hashanah (the first day) and Yom Kippur stand out as holidays where it is a compulsory requirement to spend the day in synagogue. For the reformed and conservative branches of Judaism, this is not the requirement with the Jewish holidays of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, Passover, Shavuot, Tisha B'Av, and Lag BaOmer. **In other words Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur stand alone in their importance and requirement for having a physical presence at the synagogue.** For Christians, it has long been understood that Christmas and Good Friday (and Easter are extremely important holidays, whereas Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Feast of the Ascension, and All Saints Day are still significant, but the observances of these holidays do not require one to miss school or work.

Please do not "turn back the clock" and force our students to miss school on days where their religions compel them to spend the time reflecting—with their families—on how to be better people and better citizens. Isn't this the type of family values we all want to instill in our children?

Sincerely,

<mailto:abrs@acton-ma.gov>

(no subject)

10:45:40

1>

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 3:31 PM

To: abrs@acton-ma.gov

Dear Dr. Mills,

As a resident of Acton, and a special education teacher in Concord, I have witnessed the effects of having the Jewish holidays "off" and "not off".

This year at CCHS, the Jewish holidays were no longer "off". Many teachers made no accommodations for students that took the holidays and spent the days busy with religious observance and family. Work was due, homework was expected and new material was covered that had to be made up. This is so very difficult for many students in such a highly academically challenging school as CCHS. This is not the case with Christmas when students get a long vacation.

As a Jewish parent of children that have graduated from AB years ago, I have seen the stress on my children before 1994, when as youngsters in Mc Carthy Towne, they missed school because of the holidays. Even in elementary school, my son's teacher made remarks to my child about taking Jewish Holidays off that were disturbing. That was when no consideration was given to the Jewish holidays.

I understand that it may seem unfair to "give Jewish holidays off" without similarly respecting Moslem, Hindu etc. holidays. However, not all religious holidays are alike in the effect they have on the students. The nature of the observation of Yom Kippur and to a lesser extent, Rosh Hashanah make studying for school impossible. Chanukah on the other hand can easily be observed while the student goes to school.

Thus when making the decision about closing school for religious holidays, please take into account the effect on the conscientious student. Ask if it is possible for the student to follow his/her faith while attending school without a conflict.

Additionally, as a CCHS employee this year I was forced to take all my cherished personal days for the Jewish holidays. I am not sure what I will do about Passover.

In conclusion, like so many Acton residents, we moved here primarily because of the quality of the schools. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the fine education that my children have received.

Yours truly,



Path: #5746401 @actonma.gov

Acton and Religious Holiday observance/School Calendar

1 message

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 2:12 PM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Dear Committee Members,

I am a Jewish Acton resident with children at the Elementary and High school. Moving here a few years ago turned out to be an excellent choice, not only because of the fabulous school system, but because there is a strong sense of diversity here, and respect for the diversity (Jewish holidays, Chinese new Year, Indian Maasti singing group at High School, etc).

It is heart warming to see the two most important Jewish Religious holidays observed by the schools, as well as Good Friday.

At an extremely stressful time of year--new teachers, new transition--my children are given the message that it is okay to need time of off to celebrate and pray and that this community respects and values that.

It is part of what makes this town special.

We live in such a pressured and fast culture: It is so nice to slow down once in a while and take the time to breathe.

If schools take away these holy days, we will again find ourselves scrambling for ways to convince our children it is okay to take these days off for prayer and temple services, when in fact they are highly stressed at the idea of missing school and being behind. The children and the adults will be stressed and the September transition will be even worse than it is.

I would urge Acton to reconsider and, in fact, consider making our town 1 of a kind by creating a calendar that respect the main cultures in this town. South Asian communities could be honored as well with a Diwali day off.

I would be disappointed if the schools failed to see how wonderfully inclusive and respectful what they have set in place in the calendar since the 90's is, and what a shame it would be to take it away.

Kind Regards,

Acton, MA 01720

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Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools

2013-2014 calendar changes

Access to:

com>

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 1:32 PM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Cc: smills@abschools.org

Dear School Committee Members,

I am the parent of a current senior at ABRHS and a 2010 graduate. Even though I will not have a student in the AB schools by then, I am writing to express my concern over the proposal to eliminate the observance of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Good Friday from the 2013-2014 school calendar.

The only appropriate way for the Committee to make a decision about this issue—or any other decision about adding or removing religious holidays to or from the calendar—is on the basis of the number of students, faculty and staff who would miss school on those days and the resulting effect on the operation of the schools. In making this decision, the Committee can and should take into account factors such as the nature of the observance (e.g., does the holiday traditionally require people to be in a place of worship for much of the day?), whether it is a holiday for which people traditionally travel to relatives, and the effect on students of having to make up work for a missed day of school (something that is far from trivial in the high school). Any other approach necessarily results in some kind of inappropriate weighing of whether a particular holiday is “important enough” to warrant observance. I am glad that the Committee has historically applied this “effect on the schools” approach.

I would like to assume that the Committee has continued to apply this “effect on the schools” approach in developing the draft 2013-2014 calendar that does not include observance of these holidays. But I am puzzled about what has changed since the last time we addressed this issue. Does the Committee have new information that fewer students, faculty and staff would observe these holidays and miss school? Do the schools now have access to a greater number of substitute teachers, something that was cited as a problem when this issue last came up?

If nothing significant has changed, then I don’t see what will be achieved by holding school on these holidays, other than creating extra work and anxiety for students, faculty and staff. For the students who miss school to observe the holidays, there will be the extra burden of making up the missed work. This, in turn, means more work for the faculty and staff who are required by the schools’ policy to accommodate students who miss school for religious reasons. (To be clear, I strongly support that policy and, obviously, the vigorous enforcement of that policy will become even more important if these holidays were to cease to be included in the school calendar.) And, if the school isn’t able to provide a real “learning day” for students who attend school on those holidays because of the number of other students, faculty and staff who are not there, it seems to me that we’ve actually made things worse.

As someone who had to miss school on the Jewish holidays growing up, I know that it can be a very difficult choice whether to follow your religious beliefs or go to school. This is true whether or not the school has a vigorously enforced policy to accommodate students who miss school for religious reasons. I have been very happy that my children did not have to face that decision. I hope that the Committee will not force our students, faculty and staff to face those decisions in order to preserve two additional days on the school calendar (Yom Kippur falls on a Saturday in 2013) when the schools will not be in a position to provide their typical excellent educational experience.

Sincerely,



David P. V. ...@acton-ma.gov

Religious holidays on the school calendar

David P. V. ...@acton-ma.gov

m>

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 11:39 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Dear Members of the School Committee:

I urge you to preserve Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Good Friday as no-school days on the school calendar. From the Jewish perspective, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the most observed holidays on the Jewish calendar. The main events of these holidays are attending long services in a synagogue, fasting on Yom Kippur and having family gatherings. Making these two holidays school days will put significant pressure on students (and their parents) who will have to choose, essentially, between their family and religious traditions on one hand, and school demands on the other.

It appears to me that valuable school instruction time can be gained by eliminating early dismissal days (making them full school days) that occur before some holidays.

Sincerely,

presently a parent of an 8th grader.



mailto:abrsc@acton-ma.gov

school calendar

11/10/12 10:00

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 9:40 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

I have lived in Acton-Boxborough for over 20 years and my kids have attended Blanchard and the junior and senior high school.

I was disturbed when the Blanchard calendar recently changed, removing the Jewish holidays and Good Friday from the calendar. In prior years, Blanchard always synched their calendar with the regional schools. Now the calendars are different which creates problems for families with children in both districts.

I recall that one of the strongest reasons not to have school on these days is because of the large numbers of teachers that would be absent and the difficulty getting sufficient substitutes to fill in. As such, the quality of the school day, if held, would likely diminish, with a large number of substitutes in place.

We choose to attend synagogue on the Jewish holidays. It is a time for family and reflection. While I do not wish to impose my religious beliefs on others, having school on those days makes it difficult for children who choose to observe the holiday. While teachers may not be allowed to give tests or quizzes on those days, if there is learning time, then kids who do not attend school that day miss out, which is stressful for them. If there is not learning time because there is a substitute, then there isn't much purpose in having class at all. And, as others have noted, this scenario potentially creates resentment towards those that did not attend school that day.

When this issue has come up at school committee meetings in the past, there has been much passionate and sometimes divisive discussion. It always leaves bad feelings in a community that prides itself on recognition of diversity.

I strongly encourage the school committee to maintain those holidays that, as a requirement of observance, require students to miss school. If there are other holidays that require similar observances during the school day, then they should also be considered as school holidays.

If there is concern about the school calendar extending too late into the year to accommodate these holidays, I would strongly encourage elimination of the February vacation week (perhaps exclusive of Presidents Day) and the April break (except for Good Friday) and consider having one week off during the month of March. This would provide greater continuity to the school year and also relieve parents of the strain of making accommodations for their children during two weeks of the winter season, when there isn't much to do.

Thank you for your consideration.



Red Hair (mailto:rhair@actonma.org)

Jewish Holidays

To: rhair@actonma.org

Tue, Dec 4, 2012 at 9:33 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Dear Dr. Mills,

I would like to make a plea for this school committee to keep the AB schools closed on the Jewish High Holidays. It has meant a lot to us, in the Acton community, that these holidays are observed by the school system. As you probably know, Jewish kids often struggle with feeling marginalized and left out in the wake of Christmas. It is symbolic for their holidays to be recognized by the mainstream community.

Also, although it may not be terrible to miss a day of school for our third grader, as the grades progress, it becomes more difficult to make up the work that is missed when a child absent. Given the size of the Jewish population (amongst students and teachers), having school in session on high holidays could pose a significant problem for all involved. We will continue to attend services, and be with family on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

It would mean a lot to our family, and to our Jewish community, if they could continue to be honored by the AB school system.

Sincerely,

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Dan P. ...

Calendar changes

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Mon, Dec 3, 2012 at 9:03 AM

To the School Committee:

The discussion about removing religious holidays from the school calendar has been nothing short of fascinating. I certainly wish (as I imagine many of you do) that discussions about budgets and class sizes engendered as much passion as this question has.

Having been at the School Committee meeting when the subject was first brought up, and having spoken to many people about this question, it seems to me that the issue actually is not about the holidays *per se*, but about students at the junior and high school level missing classes and/or assignments. In fact, if I recall correctly, several of the speakers at the November 1st meeting spoke not only about missing school but about the need for the students to have at least one day off during the fall since the pressure was so intense, and everyone either needed a break or the opportunity to catch up with their work (this situation was dramatically illustrated by the number of teachers with whom I spoke who were so grateful for the two days off after Hurricane Sandy as they were able to catch up with work, write IEP plans, write college recommendations, etc.).

Perhaps the School Committee should consider what seems to me to be the real issue: that our students do not feel that they can miss even one day of school for religious reasons without suffering severe consequences relating to missed information and assignments. While I know that the teachers are "encouraged" not to give homework over the Jewish holidays, I can tell you that very few of them follow that suggestion and almost none of them follow the spirit of the suggestion, i.e. assignments merely are put off for a day. Our students - and our faculty - should be able to miss a day of school without feeling that they are falling behind. It is hard for me to believe that our curriculum is so important that on a holiday such as Yom Kippur, if school were to be open, that we cannot find something productive for our non-Jewish students that would not put our Jewish students at a disadvantage when it comes to their classes and their work.

Personally, I believe that public school should not observe any religious holidays, as it is a slippery slope to decide which holidays merit a day off and which do not. Just for the record, I am Jewish, and I never attended school on the Jewish holidays (from elementary school through graduate school). And I never went to a school that gave those holidays off. What was different, however, was that the teachers - at all levels - made REAL accommodations for the few Jewish students so that we did not have the experience of feeling "punished" for taking the day off.

If, however, we cannot come to some solution that allows our students to take these days off without increasing the inordinate amount of pressure they already are under, then I would vote to give them the holidays off. Like all important issues, there is much more to this question than just the number of holidays in a calendar year.

Thank you,

P.S. As I recall, the last time we discussed this issue, which I believe was only two years ago, we had determined that we would not have sufficient teachers on the three holidays in question. Has that changed?



Acton-Boxborough Schools Mail - Acton school calendar

Acton school calendar

Thursday

To: "abrsc@acton-ma.gov" <abrsc@acton-ma.gov>

Thu, Nov 29, 2012 at 2:13 PM

Dear school committee members:

I am writing again (since this was recently discussed a few years ago) to express my hope that religious holidays including Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur continue to have associated school closures.

I understand that The Jewish population of Acton is a minority. I understand that closing schools on Jewish holidays is difficult for working parents who are not off from school, and that it adds to school year days. But I don't think that getting 2 extra days of summer is worth causing Jewish Acton students to feel the need to choose between school attendance and religious observance. While teachers will be flexible, students in this high-achieving town are already pushed to go go go, and that there is no opportunity for "slacking.". Jewish students use these holidays for introspection, fasting, and prayer. But they will inevitably worry that they are missing something important at school, as we have so successfully taught them time and time again.

While I understand that the logistical concerns may be different, imagine the horror if we asked all students to attend school on Christmas or Easter. In fact, school December vacation every year is set in order to allow Christian families to celebrate one of their most cherished holidays.

Please consider the harm to Jewish families observing Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; as well as religious Catholic families observing Good Friday, by adding these days to the school calendar. And then compare that harm to the minor benefit of three more days of a ten week summer vacation.

Sincerely yours,

Sent from my iPad



Read Mail in English (mailto:acton@acton-ma.gov)

School calendar -- for the change

11/29/2012

Thu, Nov 29, 2012 at 9:01 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Dear School Committee:

I write to express my strong support for the proposed change to the school calendar in which school will no longer be closed for three religious holidays. I have spoken with many other parents about this issue and want to communicate my sense that there is very widespread support for the change. Although I have read many editorials and letters in the paper against the change, of all the many parents with whom I have discussed the issue, I have not personally met anyone who is opposed, including Jewish friends and neighbors. There reason? It just makes sense. First, it is very disruptive to have so many days off in the Fall when the kids are trying to adjust to a new year and new schedule. It is not only disruptive to quickly setting a new routine, it is extremely difficult for working parents to deal with the many early releases and school closures. Additionally, these three days coupled with the inevitable few snow/hurricane days equals one less week of summer vacation, which is already very short. Finally, it just does not make sense from a religious perspective given the current composition of our diverse community. Although I am not sure of the numbers, it seems as though the number of Chinese and Indian families far out number those who observe the Jewish Holidays and Good Friday, so why close school for those holidays and not Chinese and Indian holidays? That's just not fair. I understand that the December break includes Christmas, but other than that—the February and April breaks and all other holidays—are religion neutral. I believe it should stay that way, with the strong policy in place supporting and not penalizing all students and faculty who observe the many various holidays celebrated in our very diverse community, which also includes those who celebrate no religious holidays at all.

I want to make sure that the voices of the opposition—which in my (admittedly non-scientific) survey of friends and neighbors is a small minority—do not drown out the many less vocal voices of even-handed and non-bigoted reason that realize the new calendar just makes sense.

Thanks,



Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools

religious holidays on the school calendar

1 message

Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools <acton@acton-ma.gov>

Thu, Nov 29, 2012 at 7:15 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov
Cc: smills@abschools.org

Dear School Committee,

I am very upset to learn that you are considering including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Good Friday on next year's school calendar. I think this community has been clear that we feel they should not be included. You were each elected to represent the community.

The sanctity of religious holidays and each family's ability to celebrate them as they'd like continues to get compromised. By holding school on these most holy of days, you are asking students to choose between their religious observance and school, as well as creating struggles and stress for the students where they shouldn't be. Whatever policies are in place in terms of make up work create stress for students during the holiest days of observance and compromises their ability to observe as they should. I grew up in a community that didn't have these days off. While there were policies in place to hold no tests or teach new material, they didn't work. There was either a lot of work to make up or a wasted day for students in school.

In addition, the lack of substitutes necessary for teachers who observe these days is great. If high school teachers can't find subs, the students will end up with several free periods.

I am strongly advocating that the religious holidays continue to be days off from ongoing school calendars.



401-875-1234 | www.acton-bor.com

Elimination of Religious Holidays

11/29/12 10:00 AM

To: abrsc@acton-ma.gov

Thu, Nov 29, 2012 at 7:02 AM

I support the elimination of the religious holidays from the school calendar.