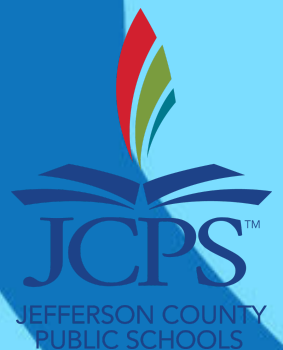




RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

2023-24



As a public school district, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) must be neutral regarding religion, but this neutrality exists in tension with the JCPS District’s responsibility to be sensitive to the needs of individual students and their families so that no students are penalized because of their beliefs, including those who do not identify with a religion or consider themselves atheist or agnostic. This advisory describes general approaches and notes areas requiring particular attention and action. Below is a list of the most common religions in the district. The religions are listed in alphabetical order.

All Faith Groups, All Seasons

The district’s policy on absence for religious observances is as follows:

- Students absent for religious observances receive excused absences; they have the number of days they were absent, plus one, to make up work. Students may not be required to turn in make-up assignments on the day of their return after the observance; such a requirement would constitute the school’s interference with the religious observance.
- Please refer to the JCPS *Student Support and Behavior Intervention Handbook* and the *Student Bill of Rights*.
- Scheduling special events during the school day as well as after-school and evening activities requires sensitivity in order to avoid forcing students to choose between major school events and major religious events.
 - Consult the calendar. When are major religious holidays observed during the year? Talk with your school’s families. Who observes holidays that are not congruent with the civil calendar? Does the day begin at sundown or sunup? Are they Sabbath (no work/no school) holidays? Are there special dietary needs that School and Community Nutrition Services should consider? Are there times when field trips will be difficult because of students’ dietary needs or special religious responsibilities?
 - Plan around these dates when scheduling one-time events that cannot be made up (e.g., Open House, homecoming, graduation, major tests, reviews for major tests, introducing new material or skills if no make-up is feasible—any major event that will put absent students at a disadvantage). Some coaches choose to avoid scheduling athletic events on days that team members will be absent for religious observances.
 - When planning weekend events, assess the feasibility of scheduling some events on Sunday so that all groups share the responsibility for being flexible and understanding.
 - Give attention to the patterns of children’s participation in evening religious activities. Consider creating a flexible homework schedule so that students don’t have major homework on the evenings that they worship until 8 or 9 p.m.

- As our community becomes more diverse, paying attention to food choices becomes more important. We now have many people who eat no meat, so the need for alternatives is becoming the rule rather than the exception. The School and Community Nutrition Services director will assist your cafeteria manager in identifying appropriate alternative selections.
- Talk with parents! Keep in mind that families' expectations are not uniform—even within the same group. Ongoing, open conversation with members of your school community is critical to addressing religion appropriately in our diverse district.
- Use the district's resources for assistance in addressing issues concerning religion and the public schools. For more information, please call Dr. Monica Lakhwani, JCPS Diversity/Multicultural Education Specialist, at **(502) 485-7269**.

Bahai

The Bahai faith was founded in 1863 in Persia and emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind. Members of the Bahai community observe nine days each year when they refrain from working; these observances begin at sundown the day before the stated date. Talk with your Bahai families to identify dates affecting them. Significant Bahai observances include **Martyrdom of Bab (July 10, 2023)**, **Birth of the Bab (October 16, 2023)**, **Birth of Baha'u'llah (October 17, 2023)**, and **Naw-Ruz (March 20, 2024)** is the Bahai New Year's Day and coincides with the spring equinox. **Naw-Ruz** is an ancient Persian festival celebrating the "new day." Called Nowruz, it is also celebrated as the Persian New Year in the Iranian community and many other Asian communities. Some employees and students may be absent during this holiday. **Ayyam-i-Ha (February 26–29, 2024)**, or "Days of Ha," are devoted to spiritual preparation for the fast, hospitality, charity, and gift giving.

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in Northern India by the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. He lived from approximately 566 to 480 B.C. Practitioners follow many different forms of Buddhism, but all traditions are characterized by the tenets of nonviolence, lack of dogma, and tolerance of differences. The most significant holiday in Buddhist communities is **Vesak (Buddha Day)**, which celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. The date of this holiday is different in every cultural community, but the local celebration will occur on **May 23, 2024**. Local dates may vary. **Bodhi Day** is celebrated on **December 8, 2023**. Talk with your Buddhist families to identify additional dates affecting them.

Christianity

Because the civil calendar generally reflects the Western Christian liturgical year, Christian families experience few problems with scheduling.

- **Advent** begins on **Sunday, December 3**, and ends on **Sunday, December 24**. Some employees and students may observe dietary restrictions during this time. Advent is a time of preparation leading up to **Christmas Day** on **December 25**. For some Christians, Christmas lasts from **December 25**, until **Epiphany** on **January 6**.
- On **Ash Wednesday, February 14**, some employees and students might be absent for at least part of the day.
- Throughout Lent, some Christian students and employees will have food restrictions that require alternative menus. (The Nutrition Services director is working with cafeteria managers to identify appropriate alternative selections.)
- **Holy Week, March 24–30**, brings special responsibilities for some students, making it impossible for them to complete major assignments or to participate in evening activities or overnight trips. Schools that have Christian students will want to avoid scheduling major events on **Ash Wednesday evening**, **Good Friday (March 29)**, or **Easter Sunday (March 31)**.

Eastern Orthodox Christian Church

The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church follows the Julian Calendar, rather than the Gregorian Calendar of the Western churches. Most local-area Orthodox Christians celebrate **Christmas** on **December 25, 2023**, but some may observe the holiday on **January 7**. The **Nativity Fast** will begin on **Friday, November 15, 2023**, and end on **Tuesday, December 24, 2023**. During this time, Orthodox Christians have dietary restrictions. **Orthodox Lent** begins on **Monday, March 18, 2024**, and ends on **Saturday, May 4, 2024**. **Orthodox Easter (Holy Pascha)** is celebrated on **Sunday, May 5, 2024**. Orthodox Christian students and employees may not be present for school/work on **Orthodox Holy Friday, May 3, 2024**. Please be aware that throughout Lent, Orthodox students and employees honor certain food restrictions and are at times required to attend religious activities in the evenings.

Hinduism

Hinduism is India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by nearly 1 billion adherents, mostly in India, but with large populations in many other countries. All Hindu denominations share a vast heritage of culture and belief: karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the many yogas, the guru-nishya tradition, and a reliance on the Vedas as scriptural authority. The most important holidays in Hinduism are **Janmasthanmi (September 6–7, 2023)**, **Ganesh Chaturthi (September 18, 2023)**, **Dussehra (October 23, 2023)**, **Diwali (November 12, 2023)**, **Maha Shivratri (March 8, 2024)**, and **Holi Day (March 25, 2024)**. The exact date of celebration for these holidays can vary in each Hindu community. Students and employees may be absent during these holidays or unable to attend activities after school or work hours.

Islam

Important: Please note that the exact dates for Muslim holidays can vary by a day or two and are subject to local sightings of the new moon.

Islam is the complete submission and obedience to Allah (God). The faithful of Islam refer to themselves as Muslims. Important Islamic observances that will take place during summer or during the school year include **Hajj (Annual Pilgrimage to Mecca)** from **June 26–30, 2023**; **Eid ul-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice)** on **June 28, 2023**; and the **Islamic New Year** on **July 19, 2023**. **Ashura** is an important observance for Shia Muslims and will take place on **July 28, 2023**. **Mawlid al-Nabi** is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and is observed on **September 27, 2023**. Students and employees may be absent during these observances or unable to attend activities after school or work hours. Every year, Muslims engage in a 30-day, sunup-to-sundown fast called **Ramadan (March 10–April 9, 2024)**. When Ramadan occurs during the school year, schools and offices can best support fasting students and employees by helping others understand the nature and purpose of fasting, by voicing their own support for commitment to a goal, and by discouraging those who tease and challenge fasting students' and employees' commitment to the discipline. **Eid ul Fitr (April 10, 2024)** is a festival that celebrates the end of the Ramadan fast.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian group who avoid practices that have come down from ancient nature religions as well as celebrations related to earthly governments; practically speaking, that eliminates all the holidays observed by other religious groups and the culture at large. They take very seriously their responsibility to witness to their beliefs, so even the youngest children are taught to refrain from engaging in conventional school celebrations. Some children are permitted to participate in class activities that focus on teaching about celebrations as an integral part of the instructional content. Jehovah's Witnesses place very high value on education, are eager to support the school, and deeply appreciate ongoing conversation with teachers.

Judaism

Judaism is an ancient monotheistic religion. The Torah, Midrash, and Talmud are the central texts of the Jewish faith. Jewish holidays begin at sundown of the previous day. In addition to an abstinence from work, people of the Jewish faith may observe some of these holidays with fasting, family gatherings, prayer, and attendance at synagogues. If schools have questions about Jewish holidays or would like more information, please contact Matt Golden, Jewish Community Relations Council, at mgolden@jewishlouisville.org or (502) 238-2702.

- **Rosh Hashanah** begins at sundown **Friday, September 15, 2023**, and ends at sundown **Sunday, September 17, 2023**. Jewish students and employees will be unavailable for school-related activities on Friday evening and absent from activities on Saturday and Sunday.
- **Yom Kippur** begins at sundown **Sunday, September 24, 2023**, and ends at sundown **Monday, September 25, 2023**. Jewish students and employees will be absent for school-related activities on Sunday evening and absent on Monday.
- **Sukkot (Harvest Festival)** begins at sundown **Friday, September 29, 2023**, and ends at sundown **Friday, October 6, 2023**. Students and employees will be absent from school/work activities during the first two and last two days (**Shemini Atzeret** and **Simchat Torah** on **October 6–8, 2023**) of Sukkot.
- **Hanukkah** is from sundown **December 7** to **December 15, 2023**. Students and employees are generally not absent from school/work for this holiday but may be unavailable for school-related activities in the evening.
- **Purim** begins at sundown **Saturday, March 23, 2024**, and ends at sundown **Sunday, March 24, 2024**. Jewish students and employees may be unavailable for activities on both days.
- **Pesach (Passover)** begins at sundown **Monday, April 22, 2024**, and ends at sundown **Tuesday, April 30, 2024**. Jewish students and employees may be absent from school-/work-related activities during the first two and last two days of Passover. During Passover, dietary requirements can be extensive and make some activities difficult for Jewish students and employees.
- **Shavuot** begins at sundown **Tuesday, June 11, 2024**, and ends at sundown **Thursday, June 13, 2024**. Some Jewish students and employees may be absent from school-related activities from Tuesday evening until Thursday evening.

Seventh-Day Adventists

Doctrinally, Seventh-Day Adventists are heirs of the interfaith Millerite movement of the 1840s. Seventh-Day Adventists are Christians who observe Saturday as their Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. Adventists follow certain dietary restrictions that include not eating pork and certain seafoods.

Note: Throughout the school year, members of Jewish and Seventh-Day Adventist families value public education highly and accept the fact that some school events will be scheduled during their Sabbath; however, schools serving Jewish and Seventh-Day Adventist students will want to avoid scheduling major events, such as proms and graduation ceremonies, at any time on Friday evening or on Saturday before 9 p.m.

We acknowledge that there are various religions that may not be listed here, including but not limited to, Wicca, Santeria, Yoruba, Mormon, etc.

Sources

- Bahá'ís of Louisville
- Cathedral of the Assumption, 433 S. 5th St., Louisville, KY 40202
- Center for Interfaith Relations, 415 W. Muhammad Ali Blvd., Louisville, KY 40202
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- Maqsood Ahmed, Ph.D., Board of Directors, Islamic School of Louisville
- Matthew Golden, Director, Jewish Community Relations Council
- Orthodox Church in America

