

Dear Principal,

We are writing in the spirit of cooperation in hopes of solving a problem that Jewish students often face: being penalized academically or in terms of extracurricular activities because of a necessary absence due to religious observance. Recent years' efforts to avoid this conflict have been very greatly appreciated. We thank you in advance for consideration in supporting our requests for these students again this year.

The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar cycle, and for this reason, holidays do not occur on the same date or even the same month year to year. All students understand that it is their responsibility to make up all work missed on a day when they are absent from school for religious observance. However, to avoid difficulties in make-ups (both for students and teachers), we have written a letter and enclosed a calendar that we are asking you to share with your individual teachers. The letter asks for their consideration in not planning exams on the days when most Jewish students will not be in school, or the following day, if the holiday involves a full day in the synagogue or with family that precludes study. This year, this accommodation applies to the following dates: **Friday, Sept. 15 – Sunday, Sept. 17 and Sunday, Sept. 24 and Monday, Sept. 25. Please avoid scheduling field trips and tests/long-term assignments to be due on the above dates. Please avoid scheduling performances, Parents' Night, or other school events after school** on the above dates and on the preceding evenings, since Jewish observance begins in the evening preceding a holy day. **The evening of Monday, April 22 and Tuesday & Wednesday, April 23-24** correspond to the first two nights/days of Passover which is observed by most Jewish families. In addition to these holidays, a child of a more ritually observant tradition may celebrate other Festivals in the Jewish calendar including Sukkot, Simchat Torah and Shavuot (see full calendar enclosed for dates and for brief explanations of the holidays.) In some cases, students may miss school for these holidays as well.

We appreciate your support in distributing the enclosed letter and reminding faculty of these dates and requests, and in taking our children's religious needs into consideration in avoiding these dates in scheduling special events or activities. Each fall, two of our committee members, Marty Mann and Rochelle Reich, present at an ACS & Buncombe County Schools principals meeting about related issues. This packet is part of that ongoing effort.

We realize that Jewish students are a minority in our schools, but if it is possible to accommodate our requests, we would deeply appreciate it. If you require additional information concerning Jewish holidays and observance pertinent to your considerations, please contact Rochelle Reich, of the Jewish Community Relations Council at (828)337-6826. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Mitchel Levine
Congregation Beth Israel

Rabbi Batsheva Meiri
Congregation Beth HaTephila

Rabbi Shaya Susskind
Chabad House of WNC

Asheville Jewish Community Relations Council - "JCRC"
(parents, students & faculty from Buncombe & Henderson County and Asheville City Schools Districts)

Primary Jewish Holidays Affecting Student Attendance

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Rosh HaShanah	N/A	Begins Wednesday evening 10/2/2024; all Thursday and Friday 10/3/2024 and 10/4/2024
Yom Kippur	N/A	Begins Friday 10/11/2024 and all day on Saturday 10/12/2024
Passover	Begins Monday evening 4/22/2024; all day Tues. 4/23 & Wed. 4/24. Holiday ends on Tuesday 4/30/2024	Begins Saturday evening 4/12/2025; all day Sun. 4/13 & Mon. 4/14. Holiday ends on Sunday 4/20/2025

All students should discuss their family's religious observances with their individual teachers as it pertains to absences

A brief explanation of Jewish holidays:

Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year marks the beginning of a 10-day period of reflection, self-examination and spiritual renewal known as the Jewish High Holy Days. The beginning (Rosh Hashanah) and the end (Yom Kippur) are the most solemn days in the Jewish calendar. Celebration includes worship services during the days and evenings, prayer, blowing of the shofar (ram's horn), resolutions to become a better person and to help create a better world, and holiday meals with family.

Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, is devoted to fasting, meditation, prayer, repentance, reconciliation with people and God, and worship directed towards realizing potential for goodness. Attending services throughout the evening and following day at Synagogue and a meal to break the fast after sundown with community or family typifies observance.

Sukkot: This harvest thanksgiving festival is celebrated with the construction of a sukkah or "booth" of branches decorated with harvest fruits and vegetables and lasts for 8 days. This sukkah serves as a reminder of the history of the Exodus from Egypt when such temporary dwellings were built in the desert. Traditionally, people gather for a service and eat food in the sukkah.

Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah: "Rejoicing of the Torah". The Torah's final verses and opening verses are read with processions and festivities.

Hanukkah: Festival of Lights is an 8-day celebration with candle lighting, song, and exchange of gifts. Dating back to 165 BCE, Hanukkah, meaning "dedication", commemorates the Jews' rededication of the Temple as a place to worship and study after the 3-year Maccabean struggle over the Greco-Syrian ruler to regain religious freedom.

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Purim: This happy holiday of celebration, often in costume, recounts the Story of Esther.

Passover: This holiday celebrates and retells the story of the Exodus from Egypt where Jews were enslaved over 3,000 years ago. For the first two evenings a “Seder service” is conducted with family and friends around the dinner table participating together in traditional prayers, foods, and narrative. Family Seders can extend well into the night, traditionally midnight, as the story of the Exodus is retold using food and ritual to symbolize various aspects of the story. The entire 8 days are observed by eating only traditional foods. *Some more observant families may not attend school for the first two and last two days of this holiday.*

Shavuot: Known as the Festival of Weeks, (7 weeks following Passover) Shavuot celebrates the receiving of the Ten Commandments and the Torah (the 5 Books of Moses) at Mount Sinai. Traditionally the story of Moses on Mount Sinai is told and the Ten Commandments are read in Hebrew and English.

Sabbath or Shabbat: This holy day for prayer and rest is celebrated weekly from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. Jews may attend services Friday evening, Saturday morning, and/or Saturday afternoon.