

Dear Director,

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: **Wednesday, Oct. 2 – Friday, Oct. 4 and Friday, Oct. 11 and Saturday, Oct. 12. 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 Saturday, April 12 and Sunday & Monday, April 13-14** 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 Becca Mericle of the Jewish Community Relations Council at admin@jcrctgreaterasheville.org. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Mitchel Levine

Congregation Beth Israel

Asheville Jewish Community Relations Council - "JCRC"

(parents, students & faculty from Buncombe & Henderson County and Asheville City Schools Districts)

Rabbi Batsheva Meiri

Congregation Beth HaTephila

Rabbi Shaya Susskind

Chabad House of WNC

Dear Faculty Member,

We are writing in the spirit of cooperation in hopes of solving a problem that Jewish students often face: being penalized academically or in extracurricular activities because of a necessary absence due to religious observance. We thank you in advance for consideration in supporting our requests for these students.

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. We ask for your consideration in not planning exams on the days when many 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: Jewish children observing the holidays of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur in synagogue and /or with family may be **absent Thursday 10/3/24 & Friday 10/4/24 (this year Yom Kippur falls on the weekend). The first two evenings of the holiday of Passover are also times when Jewish students may be affected (Monday 4/14/24). Please avoid scheduling field trips, tests/long-term assignments to be due on the above dates and on the preceding evenings**, since Jewish observance begins in the evening preceding a holy day. The attached chart lists the dates for the three holidays that most Jewish families observe that affect attendance. In addition to these holidays, a child of a more ritually observant tradition may celebrate other Festivals in the Jewish calendar including Sukkot, the last two days of Passover, Simchat Torah and Shavuot: (Please see calendar for dates and for brief explanations of the holidays.)

We appreciate your support in avoiding these dates and requests, and in taking our children's religious needs into consideration in scheduling special events or activities. We've provided the following link to parents in hopes that it is a helpful tool as they navigate conversations around differences. We are providing it here as well in hopes that you might also find it helpful. www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

If you require additional information concerning Jewish holidays and observance pertinent to your considerations, please contact Becca Mericle, chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council at admin@jrcrgreaterasheville.org. 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

and the Asheville Jewish Community Relations Council (made up of parents, students & faculty from Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools Districts)

PRIMARY JEWISH HOLIDAYS AFFECTING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

	2024-2025	2025-2026
Rosh HaShanah	Begins Wednesday evening 10/2/2024; all Thursday and Friday 10/3/2024 and 10/4/2024	Begins Monday evening 9/22/2025; all day Tuesday and Wednesday 9/23/2025 and 9/25/2025
Yom Kippur	Begins Friday 10/11/2024 and all day on Saturday 10/12/2024	Begins Wednesday 10/1/2025 and all day Thursday 10/2/2025
Passover	Begins Saturday evening 4/12/2025; all day Sun. 4/13 & Mon. 4/14. ^Holiday ends on Sunday 4/20/2025	Begins Wednesday evening 4/1/2026; all day Thurs. 4/2/2026 & Friday 4/3/2026. ^Holiday ends on Thursday 4/9/2026

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

For those who are interested, a brief explanation of Jewish holidays appears below:

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. This year the holiday begins on the evening of Wednesday 10/16/2024, and religious services are typically held on Thursday 10/17.

Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah: "Rejoicing of the Torah". The Torah’s final verses and opening verses are read with processions and festivities. This year’s dates are Wednesday 10/23, Thursday 10/24 and Friday 10/25.

(Holidays continued)

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. The first night of this holiday in 2024 is Wednesday 12/25.

Purim: This happy holiday of celebration, often in costume, recounts the Story of Esther. Thursday, 3/13/2025 at sundown is when this holiday begins and continues through the next day.

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. This year the holiday begins Sunday evening 6/1/2025 and continues for the next two days.

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.

