

ADVISORY

2022-2023: 02 **Equity and Inclusion during December Holidays**

Advisory Statement

The SCDSB is committed to creating a culture of belonging, engagement and success for all. This Advisory provides guidance for planning equitable and inclusive celebrations during the December holidays.

Considerations for Teaching and Learning Environments

It is important that staff become familiar with SCDSB policies related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and seek opportunities to learn about the broad range of diversity present across the SCDSB. When planning special events, assemblies, activities, parties, and meals during December, staff are to be mindful of the school community and ensure celebrations are reflective of the diversity, cultures and traditions of all students and staff. For planning purposes, staff should refer to the [Holy Days & Holiday Calendar](#) and the [Sharing Holiday Traditions in the Classroom](#) resource.

Considerations for the Workplace

When making plans for celebrations in December, consider the diversity, cultures and traditions of those on the team. Be mindful that sometimes when an individual is the only one on the team/staff who does not celebrate Christmas, who does not drink, and/or cannot afford to spend on gifts, charity, or meals, they may feel uncomfortable coming forward. Consider involving the team/staff in decisions around celebrations and learn about the broad range of diverse cultural and religious holy days and days of significance in December. Resources are available on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion page of the StaffWeb.

Considerations for Equity & Inclusion during December Holidays for everyone:

- It is ok to celebrate and acknowledge Christmas if you are being equitable and inclusive of all holy days and for all participants.
- Do not assume everyone celebrates Christmas and/or that individuals of a particular group do not celebrate Christmas.
- It is ok to say 'Merry Christmas' if you know the person does indeed celebrate Christmas.
- It is ok to have a Christmas tree or Christmas related decorations, if the space taken up is equitable across all December holy days, and preferably across the entire year.
- Consider the language that you are using in your communications. Suggestions include "Festivities of Light", "Winter Break Celebrations", or "Winter Festival".
- Changing words from Christmas to holiday, in and of itself, may not be more inclusive without it equitably representing all holidays.
- It is important to be accurate - Christmas tree should not be called holiday tree.
- Not everyone may give or receive gifts during the December holiday period for a variety of reasons and it is not recommended to ask questions such as, "What did you get for Christmas?"
- People should not feel pressured or singled-out if they cannot afford to spend as much as others, whether for charitable causes, meals, or gift-giving.
- No employee or student is obligated to participate, nor should experience any pressure or judgement for not participating, in any events related to Christmas or New Year's.

- Be mindful of food choices to ensure inclusion of all.
- Be mindful to ensure respect and appreciation, and not to misappropriate.
- Engage everyone in the planning of holiday events and decorating, ask how they prefer to celebrate, and encourage everyone to share their holy day and holiday traditions if they feel comfortable doing so.

Context

December holidays can often mean a significant focus on the celebrations of one faith group. The term 'the holidays' is usually referred to as events and days away from work to celebrate Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day. In recent years, the term 'holidays' has become more popular in recognition that not everyone celebrates Christmas.

During December, there is considerable emphasis in our social environments, businesses, shopping centres and media on Christmas. As such, it is important to acknowledge that those celebrating Christmas experience a form of creed and religious privilege. In contrast, a number of other holy days do not get this same level of attention. Though for many people, many of these references to Christmas may not be religious or faith based, they are related to a Christian-based holy day.

The collective impact in December of the pervasiveness of the dominant creed, faith, and religion through Christmas commercialization, culture, music, movies, all forms of media, surrounding all facets of our environment and making it ubiquitous, can be experienced as imposition, enforcement, and Christianization, resulting in the marginalization of non-Christian people and systemic and cultural racism. This may be experienced by some as an extension of colonization and the associated trauma and violence. Many Indigenous, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and individuals of various other faiths and spiritualities, may feel that the world is inaccessible and closed for them on Christmas Day, though for them it is simply just another day.

Remedies to prevent discrimination and exclusion in December and throughout the year include familiarization of the broad range of celebrations recognized by students and staff at the SCDSB. Ensure there is broad representation, equitable acknowledgement, and respect given to the diverse holy days and cultural days of significance. Furthermore, when planning an event around December holidays or putting up decorations consider the following:

- Does this event and/or decor help all participants feel included?
- Does this represent the diversity of student/staff cultures and faiths?
- Are these holy days or holidays less familiar to students and staff and will help raise awareness?
- Is the primary focus of the event on Christmas and Christmas related traditions, customs, and norms? If so, consider how you can make this more equitable and inclusive.
- Have you researched alternative décor or events to meet SCDSB's commitment to equity and inclusion during December holidays?
- Have you facilitated learning sessions on other holy days that occur in December? Will you facilitate learning sessions, or set-up visual displays, on holy days that occur throughout the year?
- What is the purpose of this event or decoration and what are you hoping to accomplish? Can you accomplish the goal in a way that is equitable of all holy days and inclusive of all participants?
- Have you asked participants for input? Consider a survey.
- Have you discussed this with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion department and/or the Indigenous Education department?

The SCDSB Human Rights and Equity Office is available to provide support and guidance with respect to any issues or questions that may arise as you work to ensure that the human rights of all members of the SCDSB community are upheld, including responding to accommodation requests. Please contact us at humanrights@scdsb.on.ca

References

[Policy 3130 – Equity and Inclusive Education](#)

[A7125 – Equity and Inclusive Education](#)

[OHRC Policy on Discrimination based on Creed](#)

[OHRC Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances](#)

[Sharing Holiday Traditions in the Classroom](#)

Tahmena Bokhari, Human Rights and Equity Manager
November 22, 2022

Inclusion

Our 2021-22 census results revealed the rich diversity present across the Simcoe County District School Board, with students and staff representing a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, creed, spiritualities, and faiths.

There are a number of holidays in December.

Let's celebrate our diverse traditions!

Birthday of Imam
Aga Khan

Bodhi Day/
Awakening Day

Chanukah

Christmas Eve/
Christmas

Kwanzaa

Maun
Agiyaras

Sanghamitta
Day

Winter
Solstice

Yule

Zarathosht-no-
diso (FC)

Learn more about holy days and holidays at <https://bit.ly/2SsM5pz>.



Inclusion

When celebrating our traditions, here are some things to consider:

- Decorating for the holidays is good way to learn about traditions celebrated within our community. Be sure you are inclusive with decorations by bringing in items that represent the various holidays in December. Involve your students in the process, and encourage them to share items that represent their holiday traditions.
- Special events and assemblies are often held in schools and within the community in December as a way to bring students, staff, and the community together. Consider raising awareness of our diverse traditions during such initiatives through music, videos, performances, special guests, and visual displays to ensure they are inclusive and meaningful to all.

For information and support with planning your holiday celebrations, contact the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion department at equity@scdsb.on.ca.

