**THINKING ABOUT HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS IN SCHOOLS**

**Recommendations from the DJUSD Climate Office**

**QUESTIONS TO ASK**

* What is developmentally and educationally appropriate and beneficial?
* What is most inclusive?
* As we make changes, is it beyond the surface?
* Are we over-focused on December?
* Do we signal that some holidays are exotic and some are ‘regular’?
* Keep dominance in mind when thinking about ‘balance.’ Any time we shift the center away from dominant culture, we will get resistance. This doesn’t mean we should stop moving the center. *And* moving it needs to be thoughtfully considered, with preparation for peoples’ responses.

**AIM FOR PLURALISM** or ‘engaged diversity.’

Think of pluralism as shared consideration, voice, and power for each and all. Pluralism [defined](http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/).

**SOME ONLINE RESOURCES**

From Teaching Tolerance

* [Holidays on the School Calendar](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/school-holiday-calendar), a lesson plan for investigating our approach to holidays.
* [Avoiding the Holiday Balance Traps](http://www.tolerance.org/avoiding-holiday-balance-traps), an article on aspects to consider when planning lessons.
* [Problems with the ‘Christmas Curriculum’](http://www.tolerance.org/article/christmas-curriculum-unintended-consequences), an article about the unintended consequences of school activities surrounding Christmas that could launch a conversation among staff.

From the Anti-Defamation League

* [Consideration for Inclusive Holidays](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/considerations-for-inclusive-holidays-and-observances) Focuses on maximizing educational benefit while minimizing potential for harm to students.
* [The ‘December Dilemma’: Teaching the December Holidays for Public Schools](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/religion-in-public-schools/religious-holidays). Includes specific questions and legal references regarding symbols, assemblies, performances and celebrations.

From the ACLU:

“The founders of the United States believed in the significance of religion. But they also understood that decisions about when and how to practice religion are best left to individuals, families and religious institutions,” said Hedy Weinberg, ACLU-TN Executive Director. “During the holiday season, it is especially important that we all embrace the constitutional guarantees of the First Amendment in order to ensure that religious freedom flourishes.”

Several U.S. Supreme Court decisions indicate that “While public schools can teach about religion and religious holidays, public schools may not engage in indoctrination. Thus comparative religion courses can be taught but endorsing religious doctrine or sponsoring religious activities is unconstitutional.”

The letter further explains, “[ACLU-TN] welcome[s] holiday celebrations that teach children about a variety of holidays. We believe, however, that holiday celebrations that focus primarily on one religious holiday can result in indoctrination as well as a sense within students who do not share that religion of being outsiders to the school.”