



Welcoming Wintertime: Cultivating an Inclusive Season of Positive Belonging in Schools

The winter holidays can bring joy and excitement to any campus. It is a season where many families and schools come together in positive community building. It can also, sometimes, be a complicated part of the school year where navigating the rich diversity of our schools becomes more challenging. The key to making this time of year fun and inclusive for everyone lays in thoughtful, timely planning.

1) Make sure inclusivity is a cultural norm during all parts of the year.

- a. If inclusivity, cultural appreciation, equity, and an openness to developing new perspectives is not yet part of the DNA of your school- trying to start in December will be jarring for everyone. Try to weave these themes into everything you do as a school from day one and thinking through this lens becomes the norm.
 - i. All school communications available in the multiple languages
 - ii. A school calendar that labels breaks by season (Winter break vs. Christmas break)
 - iii. A system for notifying teachers and staff of upcoming culturally celebrations, religious holidays, or honor months from many cultures.
- b. Coach educators and campus decision makers to ask these questions when making any decision:
 - i. Will this help all students and families feel at home in our school?
 - ii. Will this help everyone feel seen, welcomed, and part of the community?
 - iii. In what ways could this make people in our community feel excluded, unwelcome, or negatively singled out?
- c. Partner With Parents
 - i. Inviting families to participate in cultural sharing throughout the year allows them to share elements of their home culture in ways that feel natural and organic. While there are many holidays or cultural events in winter- there are far more throughout the other parts of the year. Making space for family involvement during all parts of the year takes the focus off celebrations being Christmas centered.
 - ii. Openly communicate with families about the school's goals and plans regarding winter celebrations and inclusivity. Be open for concerns and feedback.

2) Set goals and expectations in advance (especially if this focus on a welcoming winter is new for your students, teachers, and families).

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- a. Whether your school does small activities to celebrate this time of year in class or the entire campus prepares a performance- giving clear guidelines helps to ensure everyone is on the same page and all students have the same great experience
- b. Emphasize that activities should have a primary ACADEMIC goal.
- c. Remember: In some cultures and religions, they do NOT celebrate holidays. It is more inclusive to center a unifying theme (see ideas below).
- d. If students will learn/sing/create art about holidays, the content should about holidays across many religions and cultures.

3) Activity Ideas

- a. Choose a unifying theme that has academic or social emotional value to explore.
 - i. Friendship, Family, Love
 - ii. Thankfulness, Gratefulness, Things and People to be Thankful For.
 - iii. Helping people, animals, and the planet.
 - iv. Weather, Seasons, Nature
 - v. Learning, Sharing What You've Learned
- b. If doing a performance, provide participants (often classroom teachers and their classes) with a list of approved content to use or be inspired by- ensure there are guidelines about what content is considered inclusive and what is not.
- c. Have classes/ performers write and perform their own original songs, poetry or plays that match the overall theme.

4) Decorations

- a. Christmas trees are considered secular symbols by the supreme court- but are often perceived as overtly Christian symbols by people who practice other religious (or don't practice a religion at all). While a school can legally display those items it may make some community members feel unseen or unwanted.
- b. Instead, use the same lights to decorate the walls of a hallway or classroom. Paperchains, origami, and other paper crafts are great ways for students to participate in making the school a festive place. Snowflakes, snowmen, tinsel, and garland can all be used as truly secular decoration options.

5) Additional Resources

- a. JCRC Bay Area: [Home Culture Sharing: Best Practices for Teachers](#)
- b. The Anti Defamation League: [The December Dilemma: December Holiday Guidelines for Public School](#)
- c. Education Week: [Celebrating Holidays at School: Legal Guidance for Administrators](#)