



Oak Park and River Forest High School

Oct. 4, 2021

Report on Thoughtexchange:

“How does our current school calendar affect your observation of religious holidays that are important to you? (Please tell us which holidays these are.)”

[Thoughtexchange](#) is a unique opinion research tool that allows users “to hear from the unheard majority,” as Thoughtexchange puts it. Exchange participants are asked to anonymously respond to an open-ended question, as well as review and rank at least 30 responses from other participants. Participants can revisit the survey as many times as they like before it closes. The Thoughtexchange algorithm shuffles the thoughts that each participant sees, so that the number of rankings per thought is as equal as possible, regardless of when the thought was submitted.

For this Thoughtexchange, which was open Sept. 27 - Oct. 3, 2021, participants were asked to respond to the following question: *“How does our current school calendar affect your observation of religious holidays that are important to you? (Please tell us which holidays these are.)”*

Respondents first identified their role at the school—student, faculty/staff, or parent/guardian—and then were presented only with thoughts from others in the same category.

Overall participation in the Thoughtexchange was as follows:

- Total number of participants: 667
- Number of thoughts shared: 520 ([click here](#) to see all thoughts in rank order)
- Number of ratings given to thoughts: 10,596

On the following pages you’ll find the results, organized by role of the participants.

Student Results

Students: Demographics

– How do you self-identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|-------|-------------------------------------------|
| 10% | (22) | Asian |
| 6% | (13) | Black or African American |
| 7% | (16) | Latinx or Hispanic |
| 1% | (2) | Middle Eastern/North African |
| 7% | (15) | Multiracial |
| 0% | (0) | Native American |
| 0% | (0) | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| 63% | (136) | White |
| 1% | (2) | Other |
| 5% | (11) | Prefer Not to Say |

– Which of these best describes how you identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|-------|-------------------|
| 58% | (126) | Female |
| 32% | (70) | Male |
| 5% | (10) | Non-binary |
| 5% | (10) | Prefer not to say |

Students: Themes

The top three themes that emerged among students and the three top-ranked thoughts within those themes were as follows:

1. Yom Kippur Miss

- I miss school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On these holidays we are not allowed to work and even if we were, we don't have the time to do so. I get very behind and it is difficult to catch up.
- I am always absent for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah — three days at the beginning of the year, which means missing very important course introductions. This year, it took me almost two weeks to finish my missed work from Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, which meant I fell even further behind in classes.
- i often miss important jewish holidays. school doesn't pause for jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and yom kippur. i either miss important services, or something like a test or notes that i can't do at home due to being busy during services. i falling behind in class if i go to services.

2. Holidays Miss

- People still miss school to celebrate Jewish holidays even if time is not given off for them. Jewish kids and faculty still take days off school to celebrate their holidays but since they don't have a day off, they have to miss instruction.
- I personally don't celebrate religious holidays, but I have many friends who do and have to miss school because of it. This affects their grades and attendance and puts them behind, which is unfair.
- It negatively affects my observance of my religious holidays. I am a Jewish student and time and time again I have had the stress of having to make up. Copious amounts of school work due to missing school for my holidays. No cultural majority student has ever had to battle between education vs beliefs

3. Jewish Holidays

- The school is not respectful of the Jewish high holidays. during the high holidays you are technically not supposed to do work, and for yom kippur especially having to worry about school defeats the point
- I dont have a religion, but personally I have friends who are Jewish, Muslim, etc. I think its unfair that to observe their religious holidays they have to miss school, why is it that we automatically have Christian holidays off and not other holidays, school should close for those as well
- There should be school wide days off to allow jewish students to observe Rosh Hashanah. Jewish students make up a large portion of our school population yet there is no religious equity when it comes to holidays

Students: Disaggregated results

We filtered results by the demographics we collected: race/ethnicity and gender identity. Differences among demographic groups were not found.

Students: Critical difference

One of the Thoughtexchange features is that it assesses whether there are any significant areas of disagreement among respondents who have tended to rank other thoughts similarly. Here is the most notable difference that was found.

Side A (17 participants) gave these responses high ratings while Side B (17 participants) gave them low ratings:

- Christmas break is way to close our finals schedule. It is rushed and doesn't even feel like Christmas Break when we are testing and Christmas Eve is the next day.
- winter break is right after finals. it feels extremely rushed having all our big tests and then the next day is Christmas Eve, it makes it extremely stressful on a fun holiday

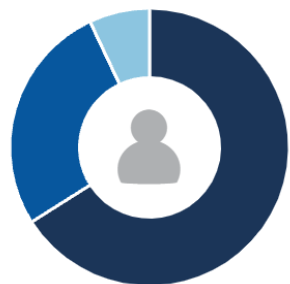
Faculty/Staff Results

– How do you self-identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|------|-------------------------------------------|
| 0% | (0) | Asian |
| 9% | (6) | Black or African American |
| 11% | (8) | Latinx or Hispanic |
| 0% | (0) | Middle Eastern/North African |
| 1% | (1) | Multiracial |
| 0% | (0) | Native American |
| 0% | (0) | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| 70% | (49) | White |
| 0% | (0) | Other |
| 9% | (6) | Prefer Not to Say |

– Which of these best describes how you identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|------|-------------------|
| 66% | (46) | Female |
| 27% | (19) | Male |
| 0% | (0) | Non-binary |
| 7% | (5) | Prefer not to say |

Faculty/staff: Themes that emerged

The top three themes that emerged among faculty/staff and the top-ranked thoughts within those themes were as follows:

1. Holidays Miss *(There were only two top-ranked thoughts in this theme.)*

- I am worried about making up work due to a religious absence as my position is not given a sub in my absence- I am required to make up the time. This is important because I feel I am having choose work over personal matters, while other religions do not have this issue.
- the schedule works for me, concerned about those that it doesn't work for...I celebrate Christmas, but what about those that have different beliefs.

2. Religious Holidays Observe *(There was only one top-ranked thought in this theme.)*

- Currently, my religious holidays are usually observed. Though there are religious holidays that are not observed for other religions which does not seem equitable. All people should be allowed to observe their religious holiday that important to them and their faith.

3. Rosh Yom Kippur

- Jewish Holidays of Rosh Hashana (1st day) and Yom Kippur are the most important to have off. Attend religious services
- Many students and staff have to make hard choices to be in school or do what their families are doing celebrating or atoning and fasting. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement. It can't be one or the other and we shouldn't have to make that choice.
- It is difficult because I feel bad taking off but then I don't get to observe Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and those are important to me. The holidays are important to me but it is hard to take off.

Faculty/staff: Disaggregated results

We filtered results by the various demographics we collected: race/ethnicity and gender identity. There was not enough data to show disaggregated results.

Faculty/staff: Critical difference

One of the Thoughtexchange features is that it assesses whether there are any significant areas of disagreement among respondents who have tended to rank other thoughts similarly. Here is the most notable difference that was found.

Side A (17) gave these responses high ratings while Side B (10 participants) gave them low ratings:

- The current school calendar only affects one religious holiday. That holiday is Good Friday
- The general structure of the school calendar is antiquated and inequitable. None of our kids are helping bring in the harvest.
- A 12-month school calendar would allow for equitable observance of holidays and improve student performance. In the modern world, there is no reason to have summer off other than "that's the way it has always been."
- It does not, the current school calendar is centered around christian religious holidays. Though I am agnostic, my cultural religion is the norm. I don't necessarily think that this is a good thing. Religion should be kept out of public schools.
- Closing the building for all religious holidays will necessitate revisiting the overall calendar-which is a good thing! If we want to allow time for students and staff of all religious backgrounds to observe their faith, we need to investigate year-round school.
- I do not think I can comment on other people's holidays. If we keep changing the calendar based on holidays where does it end. Eliminate all holidays that are associated with religion

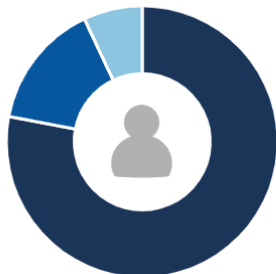
Parent/Guardian Results

– How do you self-identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|-------|-------------------------------------------|
| 8% | (30) | Asian |
| 6% | (21) | Black or African American |
| 4% | (14) | Latinx or Hispanic |
| 0% | (1) | Middle Eastern/North African |
| 2% | (7) | Multiracial |
| 0% | (0) | Native American |
| 0% | (0) | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| 69% | (248) | White |
| 2% | (9) | Other |
| 9% | (31) | Prefer Not to Say |

– Which of these best describes how you identify?



| % | | Answer |
|-----|-------|-------------------|
| 78% | (280) | Female |
| 15% | (54) | Male |
| 0% | (1) | Non-binary |
| 7% | (24) | Prefer not to say |

Parents/guardians: Themes that emerged

The top three themes that emerged among parents/guardians and the three top-ranked thoughts within those themes were as follows:

1. Jewish Holidays

- The Jewish high holidays are not acknowledged at oprf. This conflicts my son in meeting his school responsibilities and celebrating his holiday
- Important religious holidays should be observed (whether off or a day of no tests), frequently the Jewish holidays are not taken into account. The most important Jewish Holiday, which involves fasting and going to synagogue, is always a school day and frequently is not taken into account.
- Adds stress because there are no days off for Jewish holidays

2. Holidays Miss

- Bare minimum, the school should be aware of important religious holidays and not schedule tests or crucial in class work on those days.
- It is difficult for my kids to observe Jewish holidays because they are afraid of missing school and falling behind.
- The Jewish High Holidays & other religions' major holidays should all be days off. They are not even accounted for in the calendar. All students deserve time to observe their religious obligations without fear of losing ground at school and the stress of missing classes.

3. Rosh Yom Kippur

- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur should be a day off for all. Often my child has tests or assignments on those days and is unable to observe at Temple. It would be nice for our holiday to be as respected as Indigenous People's Day or Christmas.
- Rosh Hashanah (eve and day) Yom Kippur (eve and day) Passover (eve only) should not conflict with school days, test preparation, projects due etc. These are the most important Jewish holidays and I don't want my child to have to choose between important school work and observing her religion.
- OPRFHS should provide one day off for Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah if YK falls on a weekend. It is consistent with the D200's equity policy. Kids/faculty should not be forced to choose between observing one of holiest days of year & school.

Parents/guardians: Disaggregated results

We filtered results by the various demographics we collected: race/ethnicity and gender identity. There was not enough data to show disaggregated results.

Parents/guardians: Critical difference

One of the Thoughtexchange features is that it assesses whether there are any significant areas of disagreement among respondents who have tended to rank other thoughts similarly. Here is the most notable difference found.

Side A (84 participants) gave these responses high ratings while Side B (70 participants) gave them low ratings:

- It always feels like the school calendar caters to Christians. I think the message my Jewish kids get is "Christian holidays are important, but yours are not."
- The school does not allow for the full participation in the Jewish religious holidays. Students are at a disadvantage whenever they miss school. It's our religion. That's why it's important.
- Current school calendar means that my kids have to be absent every Fall for up to two days so that they can celebrate two important Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur occur every Fall. Very important Jewish holidays. In order to be observant, my kids need to miss school.
- The high holidays - Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - are the most important holidays to Jewish people. OPRF held school on both holidays. This forces students and families to choose between academics and religious observance.
- Teachers are oblivious to non-Christian holidays. Imagine scheduling tests on Christmas Eve or Christmas day & telling all the Christian students - no big deal, you can make it up tomorrow.

- My children miss a few days of school. They fall behind. Not only does missing school, make them fall behind. It also is asking them to chose between school and Yom Kippur
- The current school calendar ignores the Jewish holidays, which are observed as days off by many public schools in the area. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are the holiest days of the year in our religion and we spend the day in prayer. Teachers often pile homework those days.
- The calendar works for my family, but not for all. There needs to be more school holidays for non-Christian religions.
- OPRF's failure to recognize the Jewish high holidays - Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur - negatively impacts my family's religious observations. The students are not able to miss school to observe these days without missing valuable, in-class time.
- It forces my children to miss 3 days of school to observe the Jewish high holidays most years. My children stay up very late to complete homework and come in early to learn material they missed, and it may lead to their resenting Judaism.

Side B gave these responses high ratings while Side A gave them low ratings:

- The current calendar aligns with our family's needs.
- It works well. School is out of session during the December holiday season, and it generally coincides with Easter holiday.
- The current school calendar allows for an extended break at this time, which works with our family's traditions. Our extended family lives out of town, so it is important to be able to travel at this time.
- The current school calendar aligns with the religious holidays that are important to me.
- Current calendar reflects most major religious holidays my family observes. This is helpful in giving my student the time and respect to observe holidays important to his religious practices without incurring extra "hassle."
- The current calendar usually meets our needs for religious holidays. Extended days off for holidays such as thanksgiving and Christmas allows for family visits and travel to out of state family.
- does a fair job. it's important to have the same holidays as businesses.
- It's fine
- From the calendar it seems fine.
- It supports them.

Thank you to all who participated in this Thoughtexchange. These results will help inform our planning as we work on future school calendars.