

# “CULTURAL NIGHT” PROGRAM GUIDANCE FOR K-12 SCHOOLS

Cultural Night events provide an excellent experiential and educational opportunity to celebrate the diversity of your school community, uplift students’ sense of pride in their unique identities, and foster hands-on learning about cultures other than one’s own. However, these events can also become spaces where the identity, culture, and religion of Jewish students are denigrated, flattened, or erased. [American Jewish Committee](#)<sup>1</sup> (AJC) offers this guidance below to help you plan and execute a Cultural Night event that is inclusive and respectful of everyone in your school community, including Jewish students and families.

## CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

- **Respectful representation:** All cultural presentations should be devoid of stereotypes or oversimplifications, checked for content accuracy, and ultimately respectful of the school’s values and the event’s goals. Context should be provided for cultural practices to help attendees understand and appreciate shared traditions.
- **Consider event terminology:** The name of the event matters. “International Night” can exclude Jewish identity because many Jews typically do not connect to the countries from which their ancestors emigrated, countries that too often oppressed and even murdered Jews. Consider using a title like “Cultural Celebration Night” or “‘How We Do It’ Night.” Consider choosing a specific theme to help narrow the focus, such as “Family Celebrations”.
- **Proactively address misconceptions about cultural appropriation:** Ensure Jewish students are not accused of cultural appropriation for including foods like hummus in their cultural displays. These foods are part of a broader Middle Eastern heritage shared by many cultures, including the millions of Jews whose families’ migration history includes centuries, if not millennia, in the Middle East and North Africa.
- **Do not flatten Jewish diversity:** Jewish identity and culture are rich and diverse. Avoid reducing Jewish culture to a monolithic experience. Allow multiple representations from different students to ensure a broad spectrum of Jewish traditions, languages, and histories in any Jewish cultural displays.
- **Ensure there is no erasure of Jewish identity or history:** Do not allow the erasure of the State of Israel or the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. While it is appropriate for Palestinian culture and identity to be honored and displayed, ensure this is done in a way that does not misrepresent reality or negate Jewish history or identity. For example, a map of Israel/Palestine that labels the entire area as Palestine is both factually inaccurate and also erases the existence of the Jewish state of Israel in which nearly half of the world’s Jews live.

# “CULTURAL NIGHT” PROGRAM GUIDANCE FOR K-12 SCHOOLS (CONT.)

## INCLUSIVE PREPARATION & LOGISTICS

- **Diverse planning committee:** Assemble a planning committee that includes representatives from various cultural backgrounds in the school community to help ensure the event reflects the diversity within your school and is sensitive to the unique needs of all groups.
- **Selecting a date:** Check the calendar to avoid a scheduling conflict with any major religious holidays or cultural celebrations. AJC has compiled a [5-year calendar of major Jewish holidays and observances](#)<sup>2</sup> just for this purpose!
- **Establish clear guidelines for participants and attendees:** It is crucial that all participants are able to present their cultural displays in a mutually respectful and intimidation-free environment without fear of hostility or confrontation. No one should feel uncomfortable or threatened while sharing their identity, whether they are presenting Jewish, Israeli, Muslim, Palestinian, or any other culture. Clear boundaries must be set regarding political speech and activities. Teachers, staff, para-educators, and students must adhere to the same guidelines when presenting materials at cultural tables.
- **Review presentations in advance:** Ensure that a designated member of the planning committee, or a member of your administrative team reviews and approves all presentations and exhibits to maintain the event’s integrity and inclusivity.
- **Signage:** Only approved signage should be permitted. Unapproved signage that violates the guidelines should be removed immediately by a designated staff member. If a student, teacher, or other participant breaks protocol, they should be instructed to either remove the unapproved signage, or leave the event if they do not comply with the guidelines.
- **Safety and security:** Establish a structured plan to handle potential situations in which students, families, or attendees do not adhere to the established guidelines.

Thank you for your commitment to creating an inclusive environment that celebrates the rich diversity of your school community. By approaching these events with thoughtful planning, cultural sensitivity, and educational purpose, you can create experiences that expand your students’ understanding of the world and each other, while ensuring that all identities, including Jewish identities, are honored and respected.

Should you need further guidance or additional resources, we encourage you to contact AJC’s Center for Education Advocacy at [education@ajc.org](mailto:education@ajc.org).

<sup>1</sup> AJC.org

<sup>2</sup> AJC.org/5YearCalendar