

Religious and Cultural Holidays Task Force Presentation

Bedford School Committee

April 25, 2017

Task Force Members

Attending four to six sessions:

Deborah Weidman	Student
Allison Hammer	Teacher
Colleen Irving	Teacher
Helen Pulizzi	Student
Mike Pulizzi	Parent
Lucille Wilson	Parent
Casey Ackerman	Parent
Melinda Lopez	Parent
Madeleine Siegal	Student
Frederic Majnoun	Parent
Brett Millican	Parent
Ronen Navon	Parent
Susan Andelman	Parent
Josh Sobol	Parent
Nancy Wolk	Parent

Able to attend two or three meetings:

Jill Perlman	Rabbi
Weiguo Zhou	Parent
Dolores Cruz	Parent

Able only to attend one or two meetings:

Elizabeth Nemirovsky	Parent
Patty Carluccio	Parent
Dan Brosgol	Parent/SC
Rebecca Grossman	Parent
John Gibbons	Minister
Mali Reimer	Parent
Xinyu Li	Parent
Nancy Saunders	Parent
Andie Avram	Parent
Andy Watson	Parent
Ranga Narasimhan	Parent
Judi Gale-DiNitto	Parent
Noha Ragab	Parent
Cristina Murphy	Parent
Lourdes Engel	Parent

Present Policy and Practice

- Bedford has no School Committee policy regarding the assignment of homework, projects or tests on other religious holidays, but it has had a long standing practice of directing teachers not to do so on the Jewish high holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)
- Bedford holds no school on Christmas Eve day and has a half day for students on Good Friday
- Beginning two years ago, the middle school social studies department updated its world religions component of the sixth and seventh grade curriculum
- Beginning this year, each school includes acknowledgement during the morning announcements of the religious and cultural holidays as earmarked on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education calendar

Present Challenges

- Too much interrupted learning
- Lack of clear policy guidelines regarding the treatment of absences due to, or the handling of school work on, religious holidays and major cultural holidays such as Chinese New Year and Kwanzaa
- No clear standard for determining on which holidays there should be no school
- Inequitable treatment of different faith and cultural practices
- Insufficient student awareness of diverse beliefs and traditions

The Task Force Charge

- In the context of the increasing diversity of our student body, to recommend clear policy guidelines that promote:
 - Respectful acknowledgment of different faiths/beliefs
 - Opportunities for students to learn about and respect each other's different beliefs and traditions
 - Equitable treatment of students whose families hold different beliefs
- While
 - Minimizing interruption to learning

Process

- Created an inclusive interfaith task force of students, parents, faculty and community members
 - Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, secular Chinese, Atheist
 - Sought but secured only partial clergy participation
- Reviewed religious holiday attendance data for students and teachers
- Created a set of recommended guidelines
- Solicited feedback on guidelines from all constituencies using survey instrument (1120 responses): majority support for each recommendation
 - Survey Summaries included at end of presentation
- Task Force reconvened to review survey results and modify or reconfirm recommendations
- Met with and received feedback from members of the Bedford Clergy Council and additional clergy
- Hold two School Committee meetings with opportunities for public comment before School Committee vote

Salient Challenges

- There is no current School Committee policy so teachers' practices vary and families do not know what to expect or what their students' rights are regarding absences and missed work
- There are too many holidays to allow for academic progress if a policy required teachers not to give new material, homework, quizzes and/or tests
- It would be inequitable to have a no homework/no test policy for some faith observances and not others
- Some families feel torn about keeping their children out of school if they are going to miss too much work
- There is no clear standard for determining on which holidays there should be no school.

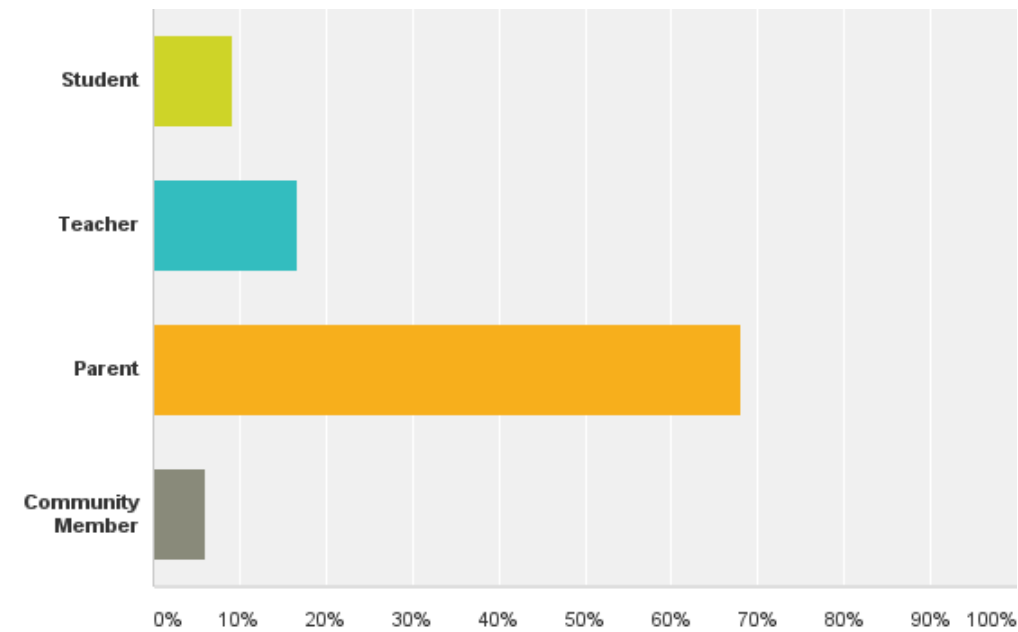
Task Force and Superintendent Recommendations

- Minimize disruption of learning by:
 - having no school only on Christmas Eve day when the high rate of student and teacher absence would preclude academic progress
 - Allowing for normal teaching and learning on all religious and cultural* holidays, including new material, tests, quizzes and homework
- Have a policy that:
 - Excuses all absences due to observance of religious or cultural* holidays upon parent request
 - Provides for extra time for observant students to make up missed work or tests and the expectation that teachers will work with students to do so in a manner that minimizes the burden
 - Includes major religious holidays and cultural* holidays as designated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on the school calendar
- Provide professional development that:
 - Orients teachers' awareness of the new policy and school calendar so they can anticipate student absences and plan, whenever feasible, not to give tests or major projects.
 - facilitates increased faculty awareness, sensitivity and readiness to support students who miss work due to these observances.
- Ensure the promotion of awareness of diversity of beliefs through morning announcements of impending holidays (whether week day or week end)
- Pilot for two years and review

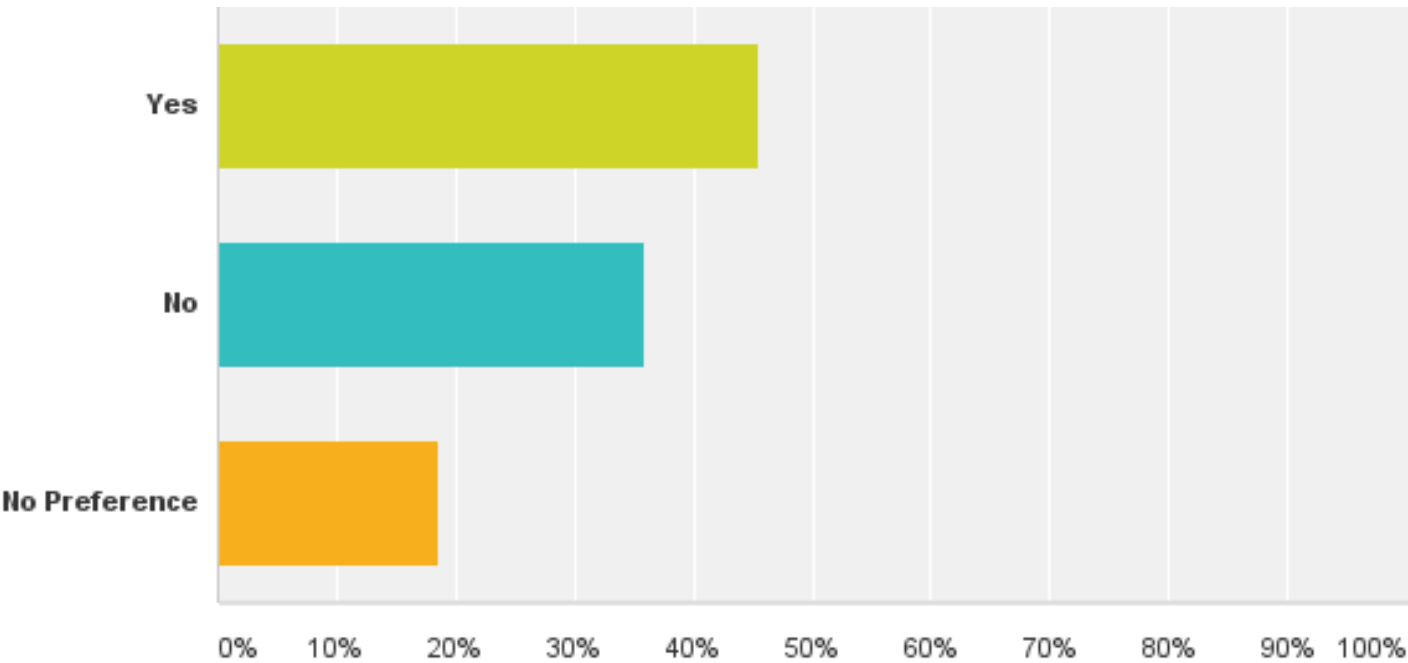
*e.g., Chinese New Year and Kwanzaa

• Answered: 1,121 Skipped: 5

Q1: My role is:

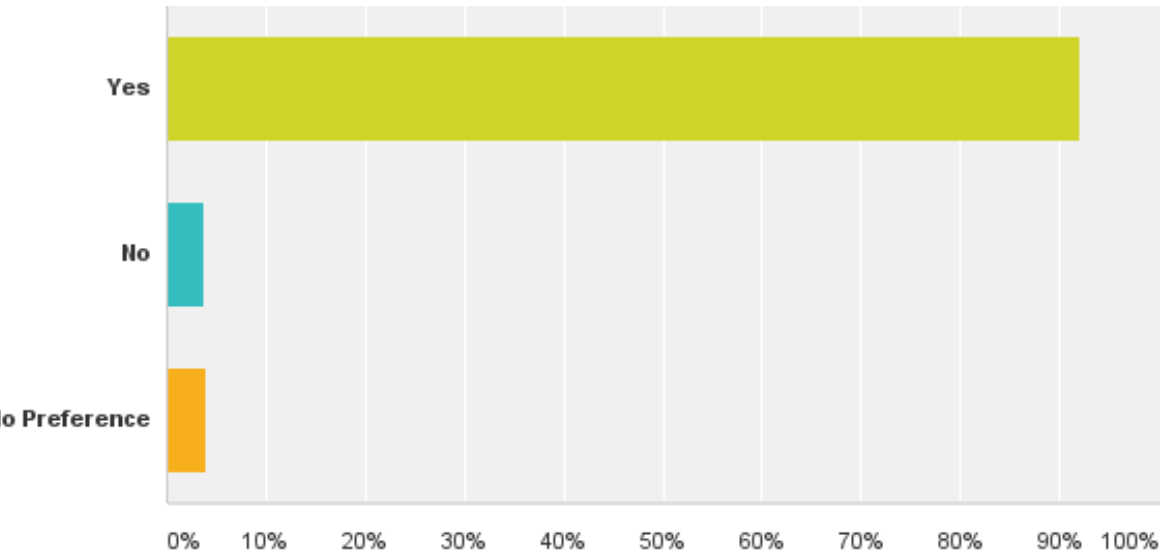


Q2: Do you agree with the Task Force's recommendation to eliminate the half day holiday on Good Friday?

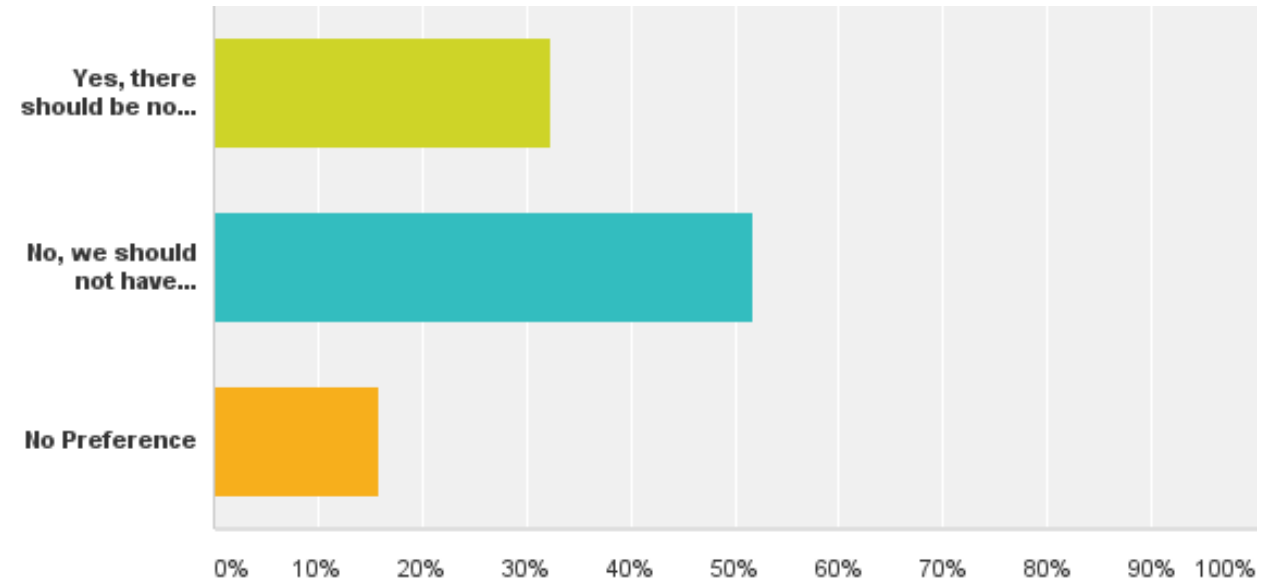


- Answered: 1,122 Skipped: 4

Q3: Do you agree with the Task Force's recommendation to continue to have no school on the day of Christmas Eve?

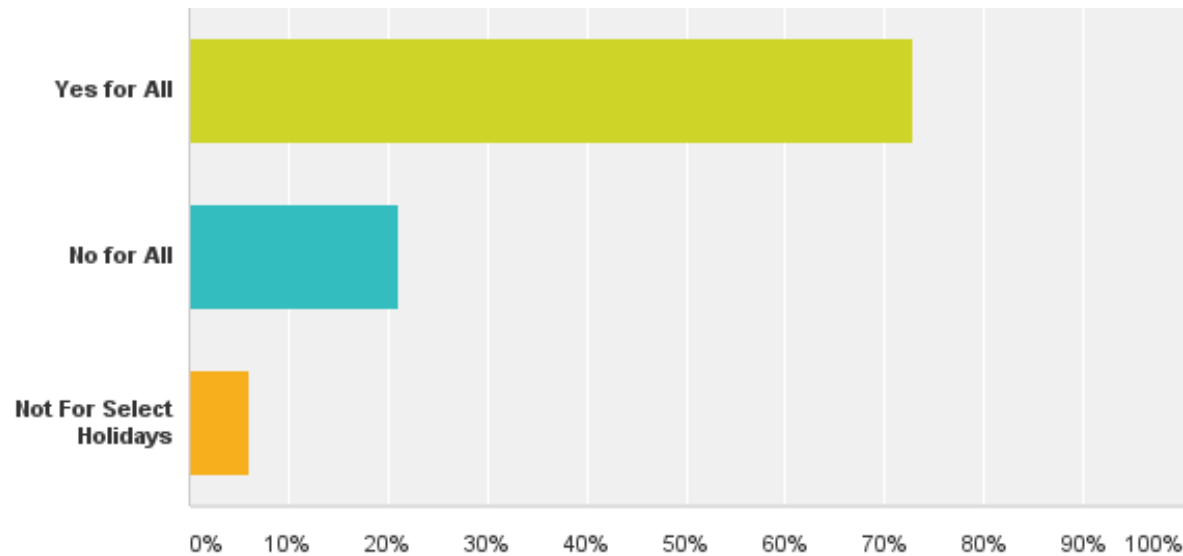


Q4: Should the Bedford Public Schools have no school on Good Friday, Christmas Eve day and on other religious or cultural holidays?

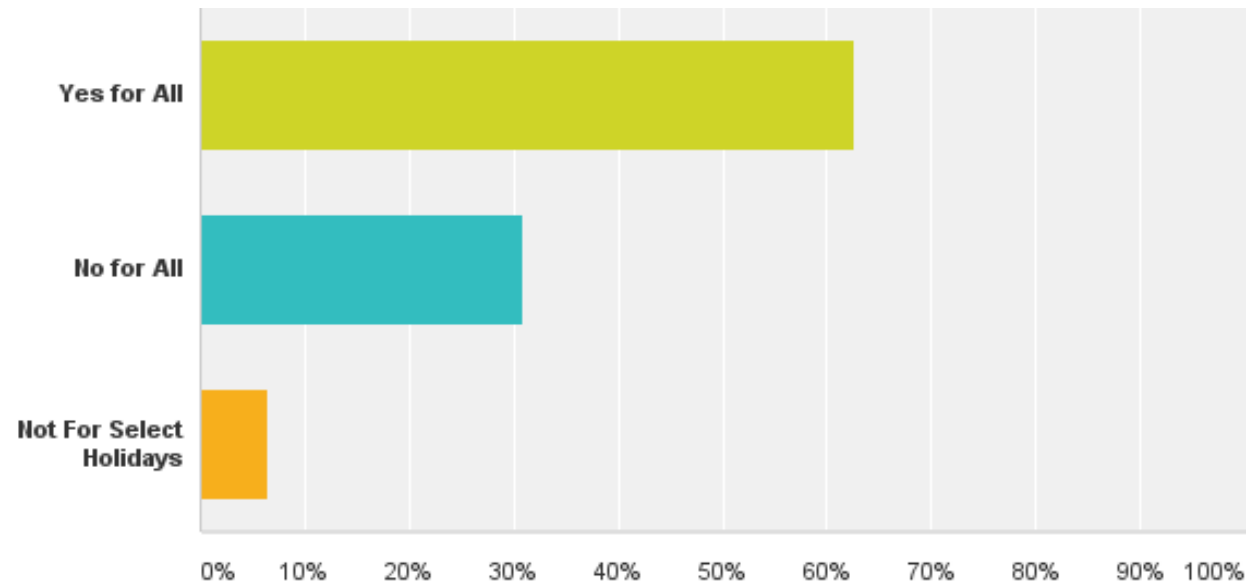


- Answered: 1,113 Skipped: 13

Q6: Do you agree with the Task Force's recommendation to allow homework on and immediately following some or all religious or cultural holidays with extended time for absent/observant students to make up the work?

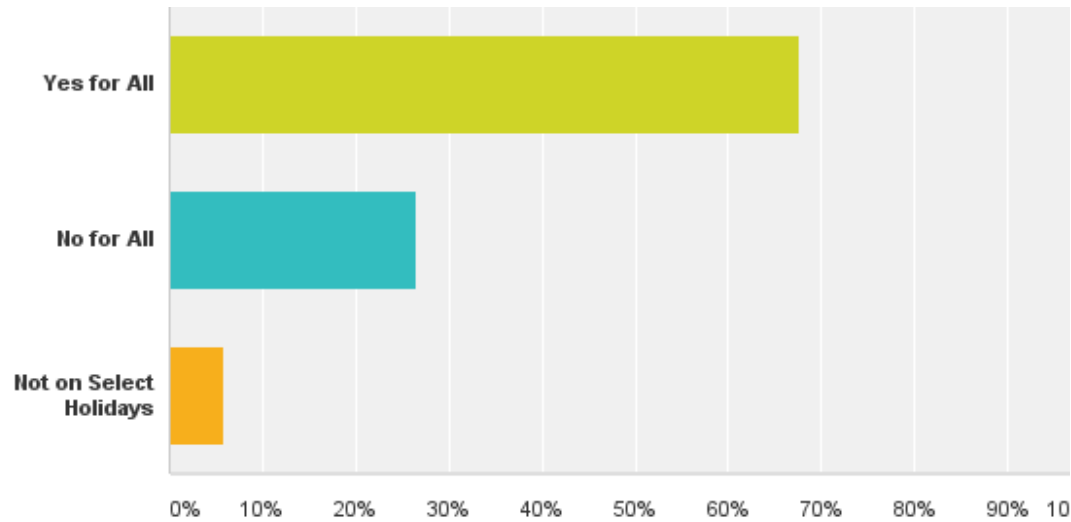


Q7: Do you agree with the Task Force's recommendation to allow tests and quizzes on and immediately after religious and cultural holidays with extended opportunities for absent/observant students to make up the assessments?

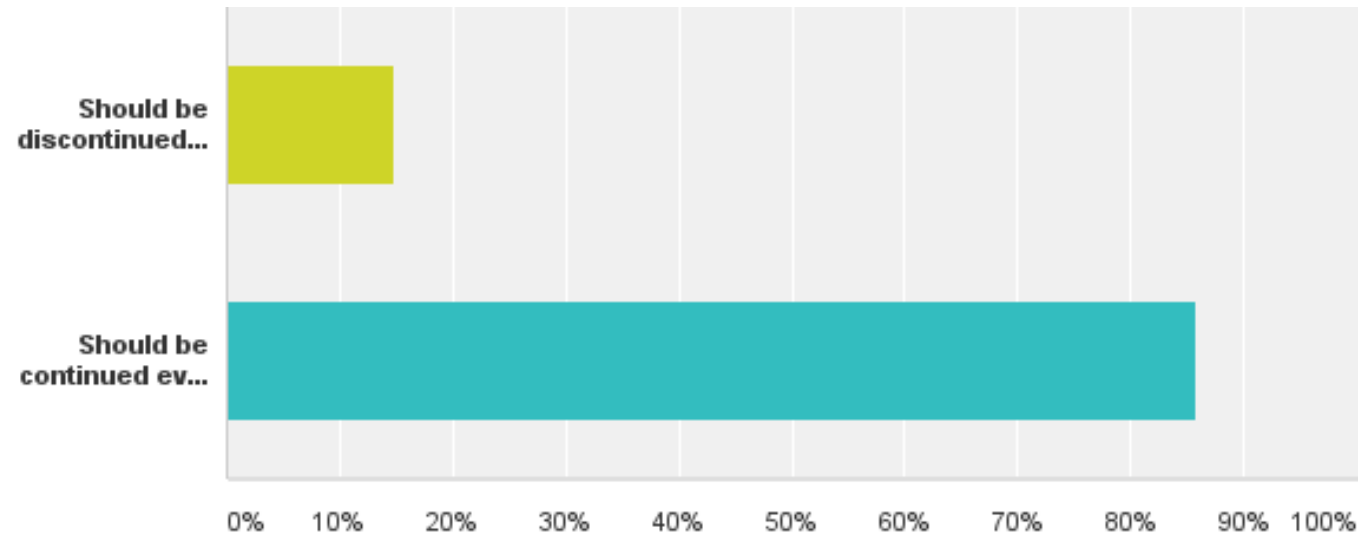


- Answered: 1,110 Skipped: 16

Q8: Do you agree with the Task Force's recommendation to allow new material to be taught on religious and cultural holidays with extended opportunities for absent/observant students to learn the new material?

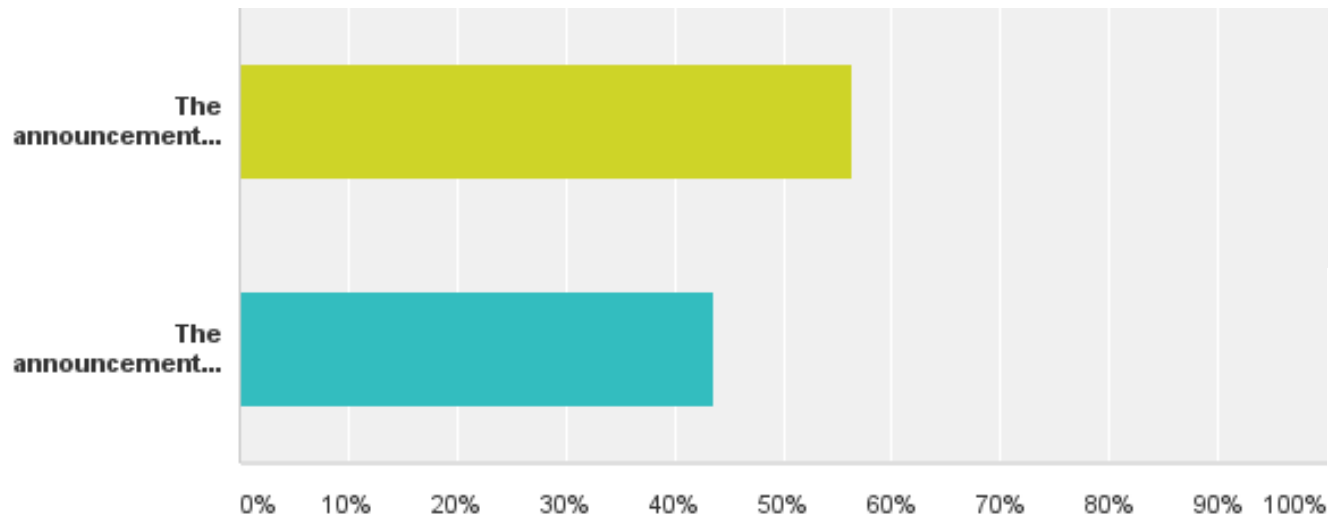


Q10: Our present practice of announcing all of the major religious/cultural holidays over the loudspeaker to address existing inequities and to promote an appreciation of diversity:

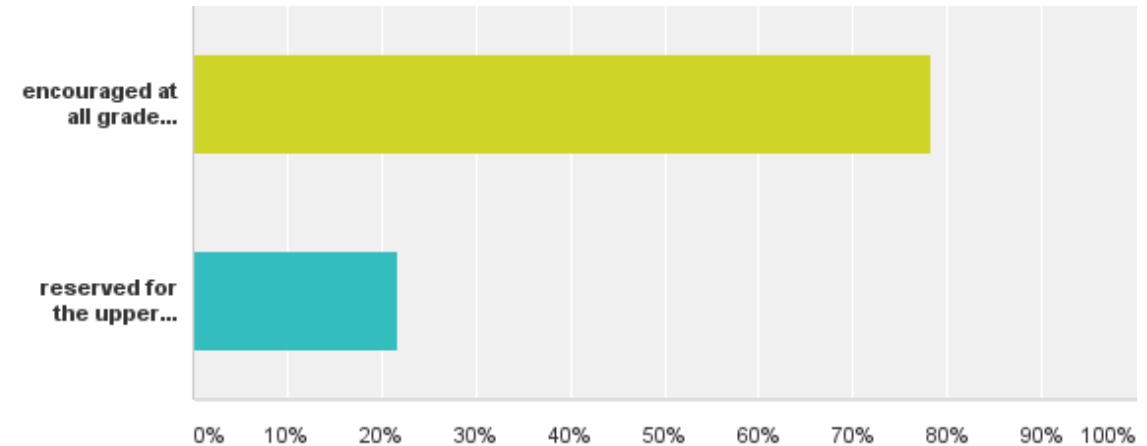


- Answered: 997 Skipped: 129

Q11: If you believe that we should continue to announce religious/cultural holidays, please answer the following:

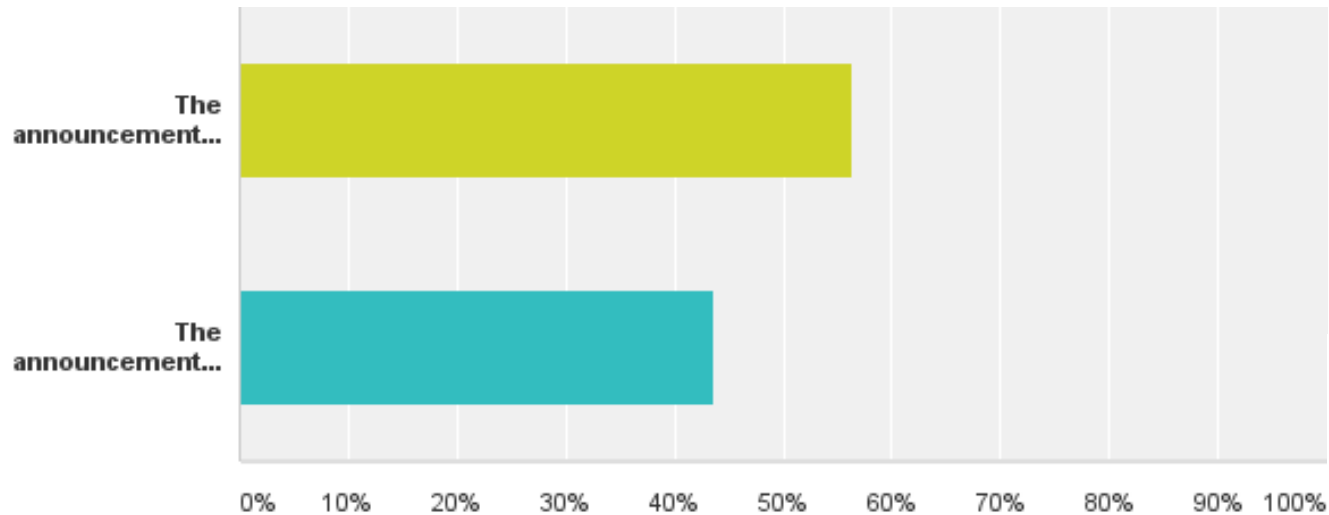


Q12: More in-depth exploration of the meaning of the religious holidays should be:



- Answered: 997 Skipped: 129

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Q12: More in-depth exploration of the meaning of the religious holidays should be:

