

Across the country, a push to observe Muslim holidays in school calendars

by [Alejandra Molina](#)

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People hold signs in support of recognizing Eid al-Fitr as a holiday during a San Francisco Unified School District meeting on March 7. (Photo courtesy of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center)

Instead of fully enjoying celebrations for Eid al-Fitr, the festival that marks the end of Ramadan, Aisha Majdoub has often found herself preoccupied, wondering what her classmates were doing or thinking about missed schoolwork as she tried to commemorate the holiday with family.

“If you miss math for one day, it’s pretty tough to get back on track,” said Majdoub, 15, a sophomore at Galileo Academy of Science and Technology, a public high school in San Francisco.

Her parents have also felt guilty, she said, “like (they) were depriving me of a day of education.”

[During Eid al-Fitr](#), which means “the feast of breaking the fast,” there are two to three days of celebrations with special morning prayers and sweet homemade dishes. Gifts are given to children and to those in need. Muslims are encouraged to forgive and seek forgiveness.

“I’ve always wondered to myself, why is it not a (recognized) holiday?” she said.

Now, Majdoub is among students and organizers in the Bay Area who are pushing the San Francisco Board of Education—which earlier this month agreed to shift next year’s spring break to accommodate Eid celebrations—to close in observance of the Islamic holiday.

Each year, Muslims celebrate two Eids, with Eid al-Fitr happening earlier in the year and Eid al-Adha later. Eid dates change from year to year because the observance and celebration of the holidays are based on the [Islamic calendar](#), which is a lunar calendar.

Advocates, including the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and San Francisco’s Arab Resource & Organizing Center, say moving spring break is a win for now and have vowed to fight until the board reinstates [an earlier decision](#) it made in 2022 to add the holidays to the academic calendar. [News reports](#) have noted that the board put its decision to recognize the holiday on hold after experiencing significant backlash. The district did not return a request for comment.

Majdoub feels some relief knowing that Muslim students like her will be able to celebrate Eid “in peace,” but she wants the board to “be firm” and stick with its original decision to observe the holiday.

This effort in San Francisco is happening as districts across the nation are moving toward observing the Islamic holiday.

Eid is now [recognized](#) in public schools in three Florida counties, including Broward County, according to the Florida chapter of Emgage, an organization that educates and mobilizes Muslim American voters. The Miami-Dade County School Board in January [recognized](#) Eid al-Fitr in its 2023-24 school calendar, designating it as a teacher planning day in which no students will be in school. Palm Beach County School Board in Florida last summer [approved](#) academic calendars that included days off in April 2024 and March 2025 to celebrate Eid al-Fitr.

Similarly in New Jersey, the Watchung Borough Board of Education in the beginning of the year [voted](#) to close schools for students for the holiday in the 2023-24 academic calendar, years after Jersey City moved to do so.

And, in 2022, the Hilliard City Schools Board of Education in Ohio [voted](#) to change the school calendar to include a day off for Eid al-Fitr when it falls on a school day.

New York City was the first big-city school district, in 2015, to move to close its public schools in observance of the holidays, but smaller school districts had already been doing so for more than a decade, noted American University professor Amaarah DeCuir in a Q&A [published in The Conversation](#).

DeCuir said in a recent interview that recognizing Eid as an official school holiday is an “advancement of our larger American goals and priorities.”

“It’s important for Muslim students and their families to be part of school districts that see them and their religious identities as part of the religious, pluralistic landscape in our country,” DeCuir said.

DeCuir, a scholar on Muslim student experiences, has seen school districts across the nation accommodating Muslim students and Eid celebrations in a variety of ways.

In general, she said, most schools and districts would allow students to make up any work missed for the excused school day. DeCuir has also seen districts give directives to classroom teachers, asking them to avoid giving assignments or having large projects due on the day of Eid.

More broadly, districts are recognizing the sacred holiday and closing schools, a move that DeCuir regarded as “a greater act of equal recognition” that Eid is “a major world religious holiday.” She sees schools moving in this direction—not just for economic reasons considering the money needed for substitute teachers or school bus drivers—but to “simply celebrate and promote the diversity within their school district.”

Efforts to designate Eid as a school holiday are driven by students, and not just in schools with large Muslim populations, DeCuir said.

“These are young people coming together with their friends, classmates who are Muslim, and who may not be Muslim, to be able to advocate that they want to see

change in their local district,” she said.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, for example, DeCuir [said](#) a group of eighth grade students got the school board to close schools for Eid al-Fitr. In Iowa City, Iowa, DeCuir noted a Muslim high school girl who fought for the observance of Eid for three years before the school system decided to do so.

In San Francisco, Sara Ouchene wrote a petition in 2021 advocating for the closure of schools in observance of Eid while she attended Wallenberg High School. Ouchene and her classmates got the petition through the city’s Human Rights Commission, which recommended recognizing the holiday.

Now, while advocates celebrate the change in the district’s spring break calendar, “we recognize that this is not nearly far enough,” said Wassim Hage with San Francisco’s Arab Resource & Organizing Center.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee submitted a public records request in late February to the San Francisco Unified School District to learn who and what organizations have been behind the backlash against the Eid holiday designation that Hage said was widely celebrated.

“For Arab and Muslim students, but also students of all faiths, it was truly understood as a social justice win for our community and for all communities of color,” Hage said.

Hage believes the board caved to backlash that was politically motivated and originated with “right wing” groups.

“We see these as very racist attacks, very Islamophobic attacks,” said Hage.

As for Majdoub, the sophomore at Galileo Academy, she said they “will keep fighting for it.”

Majdoub recalls spending hours at board meetings advocating for the district’s observance of Eid. She said students who were in middle and elementary school were “very passionate about standing up for themselves.”

“We’re still going to show up strong as a community,” she said. —Religion News Service