

Dear Jennifer (School Board on BCC),

Thank you for reaching out and sharing your thoughts and concerns regarding Halloween. Over the past several years, BSD has come to recognize some students' and parents'/guardians' feelings regarding Halloween activities result from different perspectives and experiences. There are members of our community who celebrate Halloween as a religious holy day, members who feel the socioeconomic pressure of such a consumerized tradition, members who feel the food products marketed during time go against their family's dietary habits, those who have had first-hand traumatic experiences of violence that make talking about death, ghosts, etc. extremely alienating, and even members who have no prior knowledge or concept of or experience with "trick or treat."

To that end, for many years now the District Equity and Access Leadership Team (DEALT) has been working with principals, administrators, and staff to rethink the ways in which Halloween is observed and/or celebrated in BSD.

This year, as in recent years past,

- We are continuing to ask our staff to be mindful of our community members who are new to the traditions and celebrations associated with this day, as well as those who would rather not have their students participate.
- We are sharing our understanding that "Halloween" is not a curriculum requirement
- We are encouraging staff to make all Halloween activities optional and consider holding Halloween-related activities outside of school hours. Although celebrations can be fun and engaging for students, our staff struggle to maintain quality instructional time when large blocks are dedicated to solely celebrations without a direct curriculum link
- We are asking all schools to communicate their plans for any in-school activities which are not curricular in nature to families, making sure to do so in ways that ALL families can understand

Here are some guidelines we have communicated to our staff in previous years which remain relevant:

- Some parents/cultures may not celebrate Halloween and would not like their students participating in any Halloween-related activities. Schools should create a safe space for students who cannot participate and all attempts should be made to engage these students in meaningful alternative activities and to help these students not feel excluded.
- One of the most important mandates is that costumes shall not be demeaning to any person or group based on age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, nationality, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or to any individual staff or student at the school. Costumes should be respectful and culturally sensitive, (e.g., students should not wear religious articles such as a hijab, turban, yarmulke, kimono, that could be viewed as culturally insensitive or as contributing to cultural appropriation).
- No weapons of any type may be part of a costume.
- Costumes should not include blood or imply any type of violence.
- For any student who cannot afford a costume, the school should provide one upon request (if the school sponsors an event that requires a costume). No student should be directly encouraged or forced to wear a costume at any time.
- Remember that traditions, holidays, and holy days are different. Approaching holidays with an equity lens does not have to do away with "fun" school traditions. Pumpkin

math, harvest meals, the 100th day of school, solstice themed arts and crafts, etc. are all examples of acceptable alternative activities.

Our teachers have to find a way to engage students without excluding anyone, all while keeping in mind that there are those who consider this to be a faith day. Even with these guidelines, we know that each school will do things differently depending on their own population of students and staff.

All of that said, BSD leadership feels strongly that our District needs to begin moving to a place where ***holiday parties and parades are not happening during the school day/critical instructional time***. The guidelines above say that “schools should create a safe space for students who cannot participate,” but in reality, no school should be holding an event in which all students cannot participate because of religious or cultural beliefs. We would envision these types of celebrations being reserved for after-school parties such as a PTO sponsored fall dances, etc. A Halloween parade can certainly happen before or after the instructional day, not during.

As you may know, there are several other districts in Vermont, such as Essex and MMU, which have already changed their practices and no longer celebrate Halloween. We look forward to working together with the community to make our own inclusive changes that are respectful to all the many perspectives represented in Burlington School District.

Thank you for reading.

Superintendent Obeng