

# **Raising Cultural Awareness**

## *Cultural Accommodations*

**Macomb Intermediate School District**



**44001 Garfield Rd.**

**Clinton Township, MI 48038**



We provide the cultural accommodation policy guidelines for the Muslim student population and the cultural etiquette recommendations for some of the major cultural/language groups of Macomb County, including Spanish, Hmong, East Indian, Bosnian and Albanian linguistic populations

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## **The Definition and Purpose of Cultural Accommodations**

Cultural accommodations are generally defined as attempts to allow specific cultural practices within another culture and adjusting one's habitual expressive habits in order to facilitate communicating with people of a different culture (Beebe & Giles, 1984).

The purpose of the cultural accommodations guide is to serve as a guideline for the communities to learn more about diverse cultures. The guidelines can be utilized as tools to learn about different cultural etiquettes and to shape future policies that promote cultural accommodations, tolerance, harmony and mutual respect among diverse populations.

### **Some Suggestions for Raising Cultural Awareness and Cultural Accommodations in School**

1. **Cultural Awareness:** Be sensitive to your students' and parents' cultural background.
  - *When greeting Muslim parents, administrators and school staff should not assume that a hand shake is appropriate. Wait for the parents' initial reaction. The cultural norm is that men and women do not have physical contact, including a hand shake.*
2. **Ramadan Holiday:** *Ramadan is a month of fasting. Muslims eat/pray/claim their fast for the day before sun rise. During the day nothing is to enter the mouth. This*

*prohibits things such as drinking, eating, chewing gum and smoking. During the day, there are two afternoon prayers, and most students will combine these two prayers and say them together after they go home from school.*

**3. Provide options for food, dress code & holidays:** In the Family and Student Handbook & Code of Conduct, schools may want to provide alternatives for the following:

- *Food: Islam states that a Muslim should not eat Haram or unblessed meats. Pork products may not be consumed, including items made with lard oil or gelatin. Seafood without scales, such as catfish/shark/crab, is also prohibited. Schools may offer other options, such as a vegetarian menu as part of the menu to all students.*
- *Dress code: **Dress code** will vary from family to family as to how strict that child's family is in following the rules of Islam.*
- *Holidays: During Ramadan, a school should provide places for Muslim students who are fasting. They may do other activities while other students are eating. Such places can be a library or front office. Students can be office assistants during the lunch hour.*

**4. Provide holiday information:** Teachers should have advanced calendars to be aware of the timing of Ramadan.

**5. Provide document translations:** A student handbook can be translated into Arabic. If that is not possible, have a bilingual paraprofessional go over the

handbook with the students. If both options are not available, MISD Bilingual Education Program can provide translation services.

6. **Provide resources & support** for culturally diverse parents: Documents sent home should have a resource number where parents can call to obtain any needed translations. MISD Bilingual Education can help with documentation translations.
7. **Provide cultural etiquette guidelines for both teachers and parents:** These can be obtained from the MISD Bilingual Education Program. Please see pages 5-8.
8. **Cultural awareness workshops:** Schools can involve the community by inviting business or cultural community leaders to come and present. The MISD Bilingual Education Program also offers cultural workshops.
9. **Curriculum: Regarding music and gym,** *it depends on how strict a child's family is. Some parents will not want their child to participate in music class and/or play an instrument. When such occasion arises, the students may have a study hall or teacher/office aide duty. Gym may be fine for some families, while others will request an all girls' gym class for swimming in particular. During Ramadan, Muslim students are not allowed to submerge their heads under water when swimming. Schools may provide separate gym classes for boys and girls. If this is not feasible, meet with the parents to discuss other options.*

All of these suggestions can be part of a school policy that will help Muslim parents and students feel welcome. Administrators will be able to better equip teachers with resources and strategies to more effectively communicate and work with the Muslim community.

## **Cultural Etiquettes of the major cultural ethnic groups in Macomb County**

**Macomb County** has a diverse population with over 45 different languages spoken in the home. The influx of newly arrived immigrants and refugees has increased steadily. Some ethnic groups' cultural etiquette guidelines have been compiled by MISD Bilingual Education Department (2003) to help administrators, teachers and staff to better understand these cultures.

### **Indian Social Etiquette – (India)**

1. School officials do not call the elders and seniors by their name, but by way of respect, call them 'uncle' or 'aunt'.
2. A teacher is not addressed by name, but as Sir or Madame.
3. Children do not make eye contact when talking to elders or adults.
4. One can not touch or take off the Turban of a Sikh – it is an insult.
5. Guests are shown great respect and hospitality.
6. When going to the Sikh Temple, one should cover one's head.

### **Hmong, Thai, Lao (Southeast Asian)**

1. To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm facing down.
2. The head is the most sacred part of the body.
3. One never touches a person's head without express permission.
4. People do not show the bottom of their foot.
5. Men and women rarely show affection in public.

6. When conversing with an elder or superior, one stands at a distance of a few feet.
7. To pass in front of someone or between two people, one asks permission and bows slightly until passed.
8. When conversing with a superior, one crosses the hands rather than keeping them by one's side.

### **Albanian (Albania)**

1. Albanians often move their hands and heads when conversing, while maintaining eye contact as much as possible.
2. To indicate "yes," one shakes the head slowly from left to right.
3. To indicate "no," one either nods briefly up and down or by clicking the tongue and nodding the head down once.
4. A "thumbs up" gesture is impolite, meaning "You'll get nothing from me".
5. Placing a left hand over the chest and moving the head slightly shows appreciation.
6. Albanians use the index finger when making a point.
7. Showing both hands with open fingers, palms up, means "Our conversation is over".
8. To pat another person's shoulder means "I am proud of you".
9. Young people might show strong approval by quickly moving the hand horizontally, while at the same time bringing the thumb and index fingers together and clicking the tongue.

### **Bosnian (Bosnia)**

1. Friends may wave to one another on the street.
2. It is impolite to beckon with the index finger, giving an impression that one is in trouble.
3. Bosnians customarily offer older persons a seat on the bus.
4. Eye contact is expected when people raise their glasses prior to a toast.

### **Arabic (Algeria)**

1. Algerians commonly use hand gestures during conversations.
2. Two clasped hands is a greeting at a distance.
3. Men often slap the palm of a friend's hand to express something like "brilliant," "good joke," or "touché".
4. Pressing a flat right hand to the heart shows appreciation or thanks.
5. To ask for patience, one joins the right hand's fingertips, palm up, and moves it up and down slightly.
6. The index finger may be extended to indicate a warning, but it is impolite to point directly at someone or something.
7. Algerians avoid using the left hand for gestures.
8. One passes items with the right hand or both hands.
9. Facial gestures, such as expressing doubt by tightening the lips and raising the eyebrows, are also common.
10. Algerians take care not to let the bottom of the foot point at others, and they do not place feet on furniture.

11. Showing thumbs-up is bad; it means you are disobeying or you are not going to do what you are asked to do.
12. You cannot show thumbs to the elders.
13. Girls should not laugh too loud.

### **Mexican (Mexico)**

1. Mexicans typically stand close to each other while talking, sometimes touching their friend's clothing.
2. They often use hand and arm gestures in conversation.
3. A person can indicate "no" by shaking the hand from side to side with the index finger extended and palm outward.
4. The "thumbs up" gesture expresses approval, but the "thumbs down" gesture is considered vulgar.
5. Tossing items is offensive.
6. If someone sneezes, a person may say Salud! (Health).
7. If passing between conversing individuals is unavoidable, one says "Con Permiso" (Excuse me).
8. It is considered important to say "Gracias" (Thank you) for any favor or commercial service rendered.



## References

- Beebe, L. M. & Giles, H. (1984). Speech-accommodation theories: A discussion in terms of second-language acquisition". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 46, 5-32.