

August 12, 2015 - For immediate release

Hindus seek Diwali holiday in Public Schools of Northborough & Southborough

Hindus are urging Public Schools of Northborough and Southborough (PSONAS) in Massachusetts, which reportedly have significant number of Hindu students, to include Diwali, the most popular Hindu holy day, as a school holiday in their 2015-2016 school calendars and beyond.

The approved 2015-2016 Student Calendar of PSONAS, whose Vision includes " Our culture supports diversity, inclusion...", shows three religious holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Good Friday.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement today, said that it was not fair with Hindu pupils and their families as they had to attend school on their most popular festival.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, indicated that this unfairness did not send a good signal to the impressionable minds of schoolchildren who would be the leaders of tomorrow. Holidays of all major religions should be honored and no one should be penalized for practicing their religion. Moreover, it was important to meet the religious and spiritual needs of these students, Zed added

Rajan Zed stressed that since it was important for Hindu families to celebrate Diwali day together at home with their children, we did not want our children to be deprived of any privileges at the school because of thus resulting absences on this day. Closing schools on Diwali would ensure that and it would be a step in the right direction.

Zed noted that awareness about other religions thus created by such holidays like Diwali would make the PSONAS pupils well-nurtured, well-balanced, and enlightened citizens of tomorrow.

Rajan Zed further says that Hinduism is rich in festivals and religious festivals are very dear and sacred to Hindus. Diwali, the festival of lights, aims at dispelling the darkness and lighting up the lives and symbolizes the victory of good over evil. Besides Hindus, Sikhs and Jains and some Buddhists also celebrate Diwali, which falls on November 11 in 2015. Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. There are about three million Hindus in USA.

PSONAS, headquartered in Southborough, has ten schools in Northborough and Southborough. Christine M. Johnson is Superintendent of Schools.

August 17, 2015 - For immediate release

Hindus want 17 more added to Massachusetts schools' religious holidays list

Hindus are urging Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (MDESE) to add 17 more Hindu festivals to its "Holiday Observances in Massachusetts" list, in view of substantial number of Hindu students.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement today, said that Hinduism was rich in festivals and festivals were very dear to Hindu families. Since families wanted to celebrate these festivals together along with their school going children, we did not want

our children to be deprived of any privileges at the school because of thus resulting absences on these days.

Rajan Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, listed the festivals to be added to this list of religious holidays as: Krishna Janmashtami, Ganesha Chaturthi, Navaratri, Raksha Bandhan, Dussehra, Makar Sankranti, Vasant Panchami, Maha Shivaratri, Holi, Ram Navami, Hanuman Jayanti, Yugadi, Naga Panchami, Guru Purnima, Goverdhan Puja, Pongal and Onam.

MDESE includes only Hindu holy day of Diwali under its "Holiday Observances in Massachusetts" list for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years.

This list contains total 32 holidays during each of these school years, including statewide legal holidays and some major religious holidays. The announcement on this MDESE webpage states: "State and federal law require schools to make reasonable accommodation to the religious needs of students and employees."

MDESE, headquartered in Malden, has about 956,000 students and one of its goals is: "Support the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families." Dr. Mitchell D. Chester is Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, while Paul Sagan is Chair of Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.