

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

January 15, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Indigenous Peoples Day (12-03-19-01-A, -B)

During Public Comments, Board members requested the following:

Question A

Mrs. Evans requested that staff from the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs provide Board members with some context and/or briefing regarding the Columbus Day holiday and the possibility of MCPS renaming the day as “Indigenous Peoples Day.”

Response

Columbus Day is a Maryland State and federal holiday designed to recognize the role of Christopher Columbus and the voyages he led in connecting the eastern and western hemispheres, that previously were unknown to one another. Concerns have been raised by many individuals and other parties, including indigenous peoples groups, regarding the appropriateness of honoring an individual whose actions led to the enslavement and destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures across the Caribbean and the Americas. As a result, some state and local governments throughout the nation have chosen to no longer celebrate Columbus Day and instead celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day on an identified date in October.

Staff in the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs has responded to these concerns both in the curriculum for students and resources for teachers. The Grade 7 Social Studies curriculum includes a Document Based Question (DBQ) in which students consider, “Should Columbus Day be celebrated?” This task has been included in the curriculum beginning in 2004. More recently, the Equity Initiatives Unit November 2018 newsletter was dedicated to resources and information for celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day (Attachment).

If Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) were to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day rather than Columbus Day, there are two possible actions the County could take to implement the change. First, the Days of Commemoration printed in the distributed MCPS Comprehensive Calendar would be changed to include Indigenous Peoples Day and Columbus Day would not be listed.

The website calendar currently does not include a reference to either Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day. Second, whether changes to the Comprehensive Calendar are instituted or not, schools would continue to be provided guidance and resources for teachers to support instruction related to Indigenous Peoples Day.

Question B

Mrs. O'Neill suggested that staff review the Columbus Day holiday listing in the Days of Commemoration included in the back of the school system's comprehensive calendar.

Response

Staff will collaborate across offices and benchmark with other districts to review the Columbus Day holiday listing in the MCPS Comprehensive Calendar. Considerations for next steps will be brought forward for discussion pending direction from the Board.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Maria V. Navarro, chief academic officer, at 240-740-3040.

JRS:MVN:NTH:smw

Attachment

Copy to:

Executive Staff

Ms. Webb



Indigenous Peoples Day

What is Indigenous Peoples Day?

"Indigenous Peoples Day" reimagines Columbus Day and changes a celebration of colonialism into an opportunity to reveal historical truths about the genocide and oppression of indigenous peoples in the Americas, to organize against current injustices, and to celebrate indigenous resistance.

The idea of replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day was born in 1977, at a U.N.-sponsored conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on discrimination against indigenous populations in the Americas. Fourteen years later, activists in Berkeley, CA, convinced the Berkeley City Council to declare October 12 a "Day of Solidarity with Indigenous People." Henceforth, there has been a growing movement to appropriate "Columbus Day" as "Indigenous People's Day"; states such as South Dakota, Hawai'i, and Alaska have changed the holiday's name and many more cities have taken similar action.



[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY](#)

WIDEN YOUR CULTURAL LENS

Learn about How The National Museum of the American Indian's new program is attempting to improve the teaching and learning about American Indians.

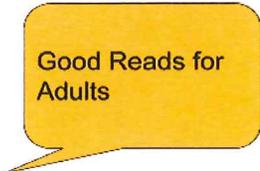
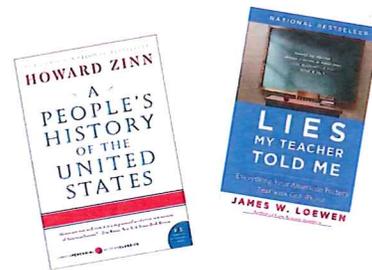
[CLICK HERE](#)



Indigenous Reads by Indigenous Writers: A children's reading [list](#)



Indigenous Peoples Day



Teaching with Multiple Perspectives in Mind

Critical thinking is often considered one of the characteristics of rigorous instruction. As teachers, an excellent question to continuously ask ourselves is, "What opportunities am I providing for my students to challenge the perspectives and points of view presented in the curriculum?" As Columbus Day was recently celebrated, lessons like these hold great opportunities for students to analyze multiple perspectives, and/or engage in debate on the merits of the name of the holiday-Columbus Day vs Indigenous Peoples' Day-which several states have adopted.

Though Columbus Day has passed, hopefully you will find these resources helpful in creating lessons next year.



[9 Teaching Resources That Tell the Truth About Columbus Rethinking 'Discovery'](#)

[WATCH](#) A Conversation With Native Americans on Race