

LWPTSA Heritage/Cultural/International Nights Resource Guide and Feedback -- 1.4.23

Many PTSAs host Heritage/Cultural/International Nights annually in an effort to celebrate their school's diversity. These events may involve tables sampling food and looking at artifacts, flags and maps. LWPTSA Council has received questions inquiring about whether or not these events should continue to happen or be revamped completely. There has been feedback from building administrators and families over concerns of tokenism, cultural appropriation and lack of inclusivity. Currently, there isn't anything formally written/available on the National or WSPTA site.

Below are some definitions, additional ideas as well as questions to discuss with your PTSA as you consider your event programming:

Definitions:

Cultural Appropriation: the inappropriate or unacknowledged adoption of an element or elements of one culture or identity by members of another culture or identity. Cultural appropriation differs from acculturation, assimilation, or equal cultural exchange in that this appropriation is a form of colonialism. When cultural elements are copied from a minority culture by members of a dominant culture, and these elements are used outside of their original cultural context – sometimes even against the expressly stated wishes of members of the originating culture.

Marginalized: to be on the outside of the dominant culture and treated as if you are insignificant and inferior. Marginalization is the purposeful disempowerment of people that denies access to resources and power.

Tokenism: the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort

Questions to Discuss/Consider:

- Is the event parent/caregiver driven or student driven? How can your event include more student voice, participation and learning?
- Are students able to truly immerse and learn about these other cultures through this event?
- How will you ensure this event isn't tokenistic? Does your PTSA embrace and educate around diversity year-round and how can this event be a building block for this goal?
- Have you polled families to see if they feel this event is inclusive and feel welcome to participate? Is there a way for families who are not first generation or know/represent one country/culture/ethnicity to fully participate? Are the marginalized and less represented communities participating in this event and why not? [Listening Session Resource](#).
- What discussion or communication is shared with participants and event leads to ensure there is no cultural appropriation? Are there defined terms shared expressing the goal of the event with participants and what to avoid?
- Is the diversity of your school fully represented? Are other countries and/or cultures fully represented, respected and honored? Are the current formats provided allowing opportunities to fully represent countries and cultures outside of just tabling? [Diversity Profile Resource](#)
- Is this an opportunity for teachers and staff to learn about the backgrounds of their students and families? How do they participate in this event?
- Is there an opportunity to take a deeper dive or consider an alternative to achieve these outcomes?

Ideas to go Beyond Heritage/Cultural/International Nights:

Involve Families in the Decision-Making Process

- Partner with your school to invite parents and/or community members to speak to classes about their background/culture or a specific topic. Include community culture as well.

Integrate Cultural Practices and extend celebrations into the curriculum

- Ask students to share their favorite family, household, heritage, cultural tradition or activity and center the event around students
- Is there an opportunity for PTSA to partner with student clubs and groups to involve them in sharing their race/ethnicity/culture in an educational and broader, ongoing format.
- Fund diverse books for your school library and classrooms that represent your community's cultures, countries and different races and ethnicities.

Assess Misconceptions and Stereotypes

- Conduct a panel for the community and teachers/staff to share their experiences or regarding a specific topic. Ask them to share input on cultural mismatches between home and school. Involve them when gathering information about cultural holidays and events you share.

Promote Inclusive Language

- Highlight diversity year-round through your PTSA communications (articles, write ups, holidays/events, books, pictures, videos) and events and involve community members in this process.