

# EXHIBIT 17

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Date: February 24, 2025

To: Jay M. Burcham, DoDEA Chief of Staff

From: Taylor York, DoDEA Civil Rights Analyst and Program Manager

Re: **Guidance on Cultural Observances and Compliance with SECDEF Directive**

This guidance applies to distinguishing between which DoDEA conducted or sponsored events and activities are prohibited as in conflict with the directive from the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) ending past practices regarding cultural observance months and which are not prohibited and may proceed, as usual. It was coordinated through the DoDEA Office of General Counsel and applicable DoD and DoDEA Leadership. I recommend the following guidelines be distributed as necessary to promote compliance in DoDEA operations:

### **Guidance on Cultural Observances and Compliance with SECDEF Directive Overview**

DoD is aligning its policies with the SECDEF's directive regarding cultural awareness month observances. Effective January 30, 2025, no official resources, including man-hours, may be used to plan, prepare, or execute events related to cultural awareness months. Service members and civilians may still attend such events in an unofficial capacity outside of duty hours.

At the same time, installations, units, and offices are encouraged to recognize and celebrate the valor and success of military heroes of all backgrounds, emphasizing their service and character rather than their immutable characteristics.

### **What This Means for DoDEA Schools**

- **Cultural Awareness Events**: Schools must cancel all planned special activities and non-instructional events related to former monthly cultural awareness month observances.
- **Government Resources**: No school or DoDEA resources, including social media and websites, may be used to promote or facilitate these events.
- **Host Nation Engagement**: Events that directly support Host Nation language and culture classes, international exchanges, or other location-based cultural education efforts may continue.
- **Communication**: School administrators should ensure that all stakeholders are aware that events previously planned under the cultural awareness month observances policy are now canceled.

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## **Rationale for Host Nation Engagement**

The goal of Host Nation engagement is to:

- Provide students with cultural knowledge necessary for situational awareness and safety in their Host Nation.
- Ensure students feel more comfortable navigating daily life in a foreign country.
- Offer practical understanding of the Host Nation's customs, laws, and societal norms to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts.
- Treat all students equally, as this engagement is relevant to every student living overseas, regardless of background.

## **Determining If an Event Qualifies as Host Nation Engagement**

To determine whether an event or activity is permissible under this directive, apply the following test:

1. Is the event/activity specific to the geographic region of the school and not an Activity-wide event?
  - If yes, proceed to the next step.
2. Does the event supplement the Host Nation class or international exchange efforts?
  - If yes, proceed to the next step.
3. Does the event help students better understand their daily lives in the Host Nation, making them safer and more aware?
  - If yes, it qualifies as Host Nation engagement and may continue.

## **Examples of Permissible and Non-Permissible Events**

Permissible (Host Nation Engagement Events):

- Guam History & Chamorro Heritage Day in Guam – Aligns with local cultural education efforts.
- Oktoberfest Celebrations in Germany – Provides cultural and historical context related to life in the host country.
- Japanese Tea Ceremony in Japan – Supports language and cultural instruction.

Not Permissible (Cultural Awareness Month Observances):

- Black History Month Assemblies
- Hispanic Heritage Month Festivities
- LGBTQ+ Pride Month Celebrations
- Women's History Month Events

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These events listed above fall under cultural awareness month observances that cannot be supported with DoDEA resources or duty hours.

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

1. Can schools still recognize historical military figures of diverse backgrounds?

Yes. The SECDEF memo encourages recognition of military heroes from all backgrounds, emphasizing service and character rather than identity.

2. Can teachers discuss cultural heritage in classroom lessons?

Yes, if the discussion is tied to curriculum requirements and is part of an instructional lesson, not a separate event.

3. Are schools allowed to post about cultural awareness months on social media?

No. DoDEA communication platforms, including websites and social media, should refrain from posting about cultural awareness month observances.

4. What if an event was already planned before this guidance?

All planned cultural awareness month events should be canceled immediately. Schools should communicate this change to staff, students, and families.

5. Can we have guest speakers from diverse backgrounds?

Yes, if the speaker's focus is on military service, leadership, or history rather than cultural identity awareness.

6. How do we explain this to parents and community members who are concerned?

Schools should emphasize that this policy is about consistently applying DoD guidance while still providing meaningful Host Nation engagement for students stationed overseas.

Any questions or concerns regarding maintaining compliance may be directed to Ms. Taylor York, DoDEA Civil Rights Analyst and Program Manager, via MS Teams or email at [Taylor.York@dodea.edu](mailto:Taylor.York@dodea.edu).

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