AJC Center for Education Advocacy

GUIDANCE FOR FAMILIES

Best Practices for Ensuring Accurate, Educationally Sound, and Inclusive K-12 Curricula



How to use this resource: *Families can use this guidance to better understand what their K-12 school is teaching, assess how contested issues are presented in the classroom, and address concerns about ideological advocacy, viewpoint diversity, and bias against Jews or any other group.*

INTRODUCTION

Families play an important role in supporting high-quality K-12 education. Schools should teach students how to think critically, evaluate evidence, consider different perspectives, and engage respectfully with others.

Many academic subjects include *contested issues*, meaning topics on which experts in the field disagree about significant questions and where important aspects remain open to investigation. These issues may involve religion, race, identity, power, or historical interpretation among many subjects that generate ongoing scholarly debate. When appropriate to students' age and relevant to the course, these topics can enhance learning when teachers present multiple evidence-based perspectives and guide thoughtful discussion.

In public schools and non-sectarian independent schools, the primary goal is not to persuade students to adopt a particular political, ideological, or religious viewpoint, but to help them understand complex issues, critically evaluate competing claims, and reach informed conclusions based on evidence.

These concerns are especially important at a time of rising antisemitism, when instruction about Jews, Jewish identity, antisemitism, and Israel may be incomplete, inaccurate, or politicized.

This guide from American Jewish Committee (AJC) **provides practical steps for learning about your school's curriculum, raising concerns constructively, and supporting an educational environment that is accurate, inclusive, and respectful of all students.**

1. Learn What Your School is Teaching

To get a fuller picture of how your school is approaching a particular issue in the classroom, start by gathering information.

- Review syllabi, lesson plans, assigned readings, and other classroom materials when available.
- Ask teachers, principals, or other school leaders about curriculum and instructional resources.
- Talk with your child about what they are learning in class.
- Check whether your school has a policy that allows families to review instructional materials. If so, follow the steps to request access.

2. Know What Strong Curriculum Looks Like

Schools should expose students to a broad range of ideas, histories, and perspectives, particularly where issues are contested. High-quality instruction helps students think critically and reach their own informed conclusions.

Strong curriculum should:

- Present multiple perspectives and historical complexity.
- Encourage discussion, inquiry, and critical thinking.
- Be fact-based and age appropriate.
- Avoid stereotypes, bias, and exclusion.
- Help students evaluate evidence where topics are contested, rather than promote a particular viewpoint.

If materials seem one-sided, inaccurate, or incomplete, it may be appropriate to ask questions and seek clarification.

a. Questions to Consider When Reviewing Materials About Contested Topics

Ask yourself:

- If this issue is contested, are a range of relevant and trustworthy perspectives presented fairly?
- Are claims supported by evidence?
- Are students encouraged to think critically rather than reach a predetermined conclusion?
- Are students required to take specific action steps consistent with a particular political, ideological, or religious viewpoint?
- Does the material avoid stereotypes about any group?
- Are historical events presented accurately and in context?

Advocacy-oriented curricula from across the political spectrum—such as Liberated Ethnic Studies, Christian nationalist ideology, or other forms of instruction that treat activism for a particular cause or belief system, belief formation, or accepting predetermined conclusions as educational goals—often raise the above concerns.

b. When Teaching About Jews, Antisemitism, and Israel

Be attentive to content that:

- Presents the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a simple oppressor-versus-victim story without acknowledging its complexity and nuanced history.
- Uses inaccurate definitions of Zionism or treats "Zionist" as a slur.
- Suggests all Jews are white, privileged, or share the same background or views.
- Describes Jews only as a religious group while ignoring their shared history, culture, and peoplehood.
- Denies or minimizes the Jewish people's historic connection to Israel.
- Relies on antisemitic stereotypes or conspiracy theories.
- Fails to help students recognize how antisemitism can appear in discussions about Israel.

For additional information, see AJC's resources:

- Guidance for K-12 Schools to Ensure the Jewish Experience is Included Across the Curriculum[1]
- Who Are the Jewish People?[2]
- Guidance for K-12 Administrators to Evaluate Programs About Antisemitism[3]

If you would like help reviewing materials, contact education@ajc.org for help from our team of educational experts.

3. Raise Concerns Constructively

If something in your school's curriculum raises a question, reach out to your school to learn more.

When raising an issue:

- Start with the teacher or school leader closest to the matter.
- Assume good intentions and listen carefully.

1 AJC.org/GuidanceK12EvaluateAntisemitismPrograms
2 AJC.org/whoarethejewishpeople
3 AJC.org/GuidanceK12EvaluateAntisemitismPrograms

- Focus on specific materials or incidents.
- Share factual information and personal experiences.
- Keep the conversation respectful and solution-oriented.
- Focus on what is best for students.

Remember that most educators care deeply about their students and families and want to resolve issues in a positive way. Be a partner and show you are willing to engage constructively. Where the issue is lack of information, especially about the Jewish history and community, sharing AJC resources can be a great way to help school leaders learn more. Visit AJC's Education Resources Portal at AJC.org/EducationResources.

4. Follow School Processes

If concerns are not resolved through initial outreach and discussion, consider:

- Meeting with a principal, curriculum director, superintendent, or head of school.
- Attending a school board or governing board meeting.
- Using the school's complaint process, if one applies to the situation. Depending on the concern, this might include a curriculum complaint process, or one designed to address civil rights concerns. If you are not sure whether such a process exists or applies, ask your school administrator or search on your school's website.
- Exploring available state or local complaint procedures, where applicable.

5. Work with Others

When concerns affect multiple students, families, or communities, it can be helpful to work on the issue together.

- When reaching out to others, focus on sharing accurate information, remaining respectful toward others involved, and focusing on solutions.
- If you are pooling information, do your best to independently confirm facts to ensure they are as reliable as possible before sharing them with the school or more broadly to the public.
- Work together respectfully and professionally. Where families disagree on approach, try to find common ground to remain unified as you approach the school or district.
- Stay focused on student well-being and educational quality.
- Seek guidance from community or educational groups with relevant expertise.
- Consider engaging counsel where the issue may raise civil rights or constitutional concerns.
- Explore ways to amplify your concerns or share your advocacy more broadly, for example by writing an op-ed, posting online, or engaging with other community leaders or elected officials who may be relevant.
- Be patient, persistent, and calm.

CONCLUSION

Families and community members can help schools provide education that is accurate, inclusive, and academically strong. By staying informed, asking thoughtful questions, and engaging respectfully, families can help ensure that all students learn in an environment that promotes critical thinking, understanding, and mutual respect.

About AJC and the Center for Education Advocacy

American Jewish Committee (AJC) is the global advocacy organization for the Jewish people. We create trusted partnerships with leaders around the world to ensure Jews and Israel are safe and thriving.

With an unparalleled reach spanning six continents, AJC engages leaders in more than 110 countries through 40 offices and dozens of partnerships with Jewish communities worldwide. Wherever the Jewish people and Israel need us, AJC is there—empowering leaders in government, education, partner communities, and the private sector to counter antisemitism and act as allies.

AJC's **Center for Education Advocacy** partners with school leaders, families, and policymakers to help schools build lasting capacity to recognize and respond to antisemitism, include Jews and Jewish life, and embrace democratic values. Grounded in critical thinking, viewpoint diversity, and fact-based inquiry, and backed by decades of experience in K-12 education, our approach reflects the same educational values schools strive to uphold. To explore CEA's full library of guidance documents and toolkits, visit: AJC.org/EducationResources.

To learn more about CEA's educational programming for administrators, faculty, students, or your school community, visit AJC.org/CEA or email education@ajc.org.

AJC American Jewish Committee