

AJC Center for
Education Advocacy

CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM in Our Schools

An Action Plan for Public K-12 School Administrators



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Public schools are anchors of our communities. They create opportunities for students to learn about and value the diverse narratives, perspectives, and experiences of their peers. In addition to fostering inclusive environments that protect everyone in their school communities, including Jewish students and staff, **public school leaders play a critical role in confronting antisemitism and educating students about the Jewish community.**

Antisemitic incidents and rhetoric in the U.S. have been increasing precipitously over the past decade, with rates spiking to all-time highs following Hamas' October 7, 2023 terror attack. Antisemitism is a problem, however, that extends well beyond the Jewish community. **Its rapid growth, reliant on a web of conspiracy myths, indicates a weakening of our democracy.** Data from [AJC's State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report](#)¹ shows that a vast majority of the U.S. general population—90%—feels that antisemitism affects society as a whole; everyone is responsible for combating it. Ninety-two percent believe that religious and ethnic communities should increase cooperation with one another. Taken together, these findings confirm that American society recognizes that effectively confronting antisemitism requires a community-wide effort with a broad coalition of voices and a shared sense of responsibility.

Schools are uniquely positioned to proactively mitigate the concerning trend of rising antisemitism by laying a foundation of understanding and empathy for students through education that prioritizes courageous conversations, and deepens understanding of Jewish identity, Jewish history, and the history of antisemitism. [American Jewish Committee \(AJC\)](#)², through its [Center for Education Advocacy](#)³, provides schools leaders throughout America with the guidance they can trust to help them meet this challenging moment.

This comprehensive action plan—which is grounded in constitutional principles, federal and state compliance obligations, and community accountability—outlines immediate, near-term, and long-term steps for K-12 public schools to counter antisemitism, promote understanding, and foster a more inclusive educational environment that is rooted in viewpoint diversity and fact-based inquiry. The plan equips public school administrators with actionable steps to respond promptly and effectively to incidents, promote accurate antisemitism education, and integrate Jewish history and experiences into the curriculum, thereby improving the school's culture of belonging and inclusion. **Implementing this plan will help ensure that all students are not only safe and thriving, but also equipped to be informed citizens ready to uphold our society's democratic values and institutions.**

AJC education experts are available to work in partnership with you in this crucial endeavor. For more information about anything in this action plan; to ask about educational programming for administrators, faculty, students, or your general school community; or to request a meeting to discuss the specific issues your school is facing, please reach out to education@ajc.org. We also encourage you to reference the educational resources created by [AJC's Center for Education Advocacy](#)⁴ to help schools navigate these challenging issues, including [AJC's Translate Hate glossary](#)⁵, and our [Campus Resource Hub](#)⁶.

¹ [AJC.org/AntisemitismReport2024](https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2024)

² [AJC.org](https://www.ajc.org)

³ [AJC.org/CEA](https://www.ajc.org/CEA)

⁴ [AJC.org/CEA](https://www.ajc.org/CEA)

⁵ [AJC.org/TranslateHate](https://www.ajc.org/TranslateHate)

⁶ [AJC.org/CampusResources](https://www.ajc.org/CampusResources)

What Public K-12 Schools Can Do Right Now

Ensure School Compliance with Applicable Law

Public schools are required to comply with federal civil rights standards, including **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has explained that Title VI also protects students and staff from [antisemitic discrimination and harassment](#)⁷ when based on a person's actual or perceived [shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics](#)⁸; or citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity. Many state and local laws also protect against discrimination on these bases, as well as on the basis of religion itself.

- Adhere to state-mandated Holocaust education requirements, [where applicable](#)⁹, and align with local standards.

Review and Reinforce Reporting Mechanisms

The school district should have accessible and confidential pathways for students and staff to report antisemitic incidents. Review school policies and procedures to ensure they clearly explain how members of the school community can report discrimination or harassment, when staff are obligated to make such reports, and what prompt and effective steps the school will take to stop any discrimination or harassment, remedy its effects, and prevent recurrence. Designate a trained staff member to coordinate the school's Title VI compliance and serve as a point of contact. Ensure that reporting mechanisms, policies, procedures, and the Title VI Coordinator are well publicized to the school community.

Communicate Proactively and Clearly

When antisemitic incidents occur, school leaders must respond decisively. Clearly name and condemn antisemitism, affirm support for affected students, and outline steps for education, accountability, and healing. Provide support to affected students, including extended time and other academic adjustments, access to trauma-informed counseling, and mental health resources as needed.

Implement Mandatory Training for School Administrators, Civil Rights Compliance Professionals, Department Heads, and Faculty

Antisemitism shares commonalities with other forms of hate but also [exhibits distinct manifestations](#)¹⁰, especially when there are gaps in the understanding of Jewish identity and lived experiences. An understanding of both Jews as well as antisemitism

(what it is, how to identify it, and how to combat it) is vital for education professionals to be able to effectively address these issues in their classrooms. Our experts, all of whom have extensive classroom teaching experience, can provide this programming for you. Reach out to us at education@ajc.org.

Incorporate Jewish Belonging into the School's Culture

As schools create cultures of belonging, it is crucial that Jews are equally included with other minority groups, and that Jewish identity and antisemitism are taught in a responsible manner. Ensure that your school's student-focused inclusion programming includes the richness of [Jewish life, culture, and experiences](#)¹¹. Humanizing the Jewish people is a powerful and effective way to proactively foster a welcoming community that is fully accepting of students' Jewish identities and resistant to bias and antisemitism. Additionally, when learning about various forms of hate directed at different groups, be sure to include anti-Jewish hatred. When antisemitism is not addressed as a contemporary form of hate in today's world, and when Jewish identity is flattened by equating Jewishness with whiteness and privilege, Jews can easily become [scapegoats](#)¹² for various social ills. Inclusion programming should address antisemitism's distinctive features, such as its connection to conspiracy myths and its tendency to escalate at moments of fear or transition in society (such as pandemics, elections, economic downturns, and global conflict involving Israel).

Organize Educational Programs for Students and Families about Jewish Identity and Antisemitism

Given that many Americans only have a passing familiarity with Jewish history, culture, and identity, and that antisemitism is also not always fully understood, education about both the Jewish people as well as antisemitism are crucial to fostering an environment with zero tolerance for anti-Jewish hate. Such programming also reassures Jewish families that the school sees and prioritizes their safety and well-being. AJC provides guidance for schools to ensure that they have the information they need to mount such programs sensitively and effectively, and tools like [AJC's Translate Hate glossary](#)¹³ and [Guide to Jewish Religion and Culture](#)¹⁴ to educate students, staff, and the broader school community. AJC experts, who have decades of experience in educational settings, can also help you customize [age-appropriate educational programs](#)¹⁵ for elementary, middle, and high school.

⁷ www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/jewish-factsheet-201701.pdf

⁸ www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/race-color-and-national-origin-discrimination/race-color-and-national-origin-discrimination-key-issues/discrimination-based-shared-ancestry

⁹ [AJC.org/MovingTowardNeverAgain](http://ajc.org/MovingTowardNeverAgain)

¹⁰ [AJC.org/TranslateHateGlossary](http://ajc.org/TranslateHateGlossary)

¹¹ [AJC.org/RecommendedCurricularResources](http://ajc.org/RecommendedCurricularResources)

¹² [AJC.org/TranslateHate/Scapegoat](http://ajc.org/TranslateHate/Scapegoat)

¹³ [AJC.org/TranslateHate](http://ajc.org/TranslateHate)

¹⁴ [AJC.org/Culture](http://ajc.org/Culture)

¹⁵ [AJC.org/MiddleHighSchoolEducationalPrograms](http://ajc.org/MiddleHighSchoolEducationalPrograms)

What Public K-12 Schools Can Do in the Coming Academic Year

Establish and publicize clear protocols for responding to antisemitic incidents promptly and effectively. At the start of every school year, schools should clearly outline and circulate protocols for responding to antisemitic incidents, including reporting structures and response measures by the school once an incident is reported.

Bias Incident Protocols Must Include:

- **What constitutes an incident of bias.** Consider referencing the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) Working Definition of Antisemitism](#)¹⁶, which provides a clear and widely accepted framework for identifying antisemitism and its many manifestations, including contemporary examples of anti-Zionist forms of antisemitism. The IHRA definition [makes clear](#)¹⁷ that criticism of Israeli policy is not antisemitic. While not a legal requirement, this definition can serve as an educational tool to guide policy decisions and support compliance with civil rights under Title VI.
- **How incidents of bias should be reported,** including mechanisms and chain of command in the reporting process. Jews often [hesitate to report](#)¹⁸ antisemitic incidents, as they fear nothing will be done in response to their report, and/or they may believe that their experiences are not “bad enough,” or will be taken less seriously, compared to forms of oppression faced by other groups. This hesitation can be even stronger in school settings where children may fear retribution from faculty or bullying from fellow students. Schools must have a clearly outlined mechanism for reporting antisemitic incidents. One option is designating a trusted educator, administrator, or advisor as a point person or resource for students if they experience antisemitism in the school setting. Take care to ensure that the responsible adult is someone to whom students will feel comfortable speaking about antisemitism. Another option is an online portal through which members of the school community can report discrimination, harassment, or hate speech violations.
- **How incidents of bias will be addressed.** Schools have different methods of addressing incidents of bias and hate in the school community. Some use restorative practices, others use consequences, and still others use some combination thereof. All of these methods are appropriate provided that protocols are transparent and consistent across all types of bias. The important point is that where

discrimination or harassment occurs, schools must respond in a way that restores educational access, corrects any discriminatory effects, and prevents recurrence.

- **How transparent communication with the school community will take place when incidents of bias occur.** Normalization occurs when antisemitism is ignored, downplayed, or diluted, or when authority figures fail to specifically name and condemn antisemitism. Because information and misinformation travels quickly in school communities, administrators should be proactively prepared with a plan for communicating with the school community after an antisemitic bias incident. Such communications should explicitly and unequivocally condemn acts of antisemitism, while maintaining necessary confidentiality. They should transmit school values and next steps, including plans to address the issue through educational programming for all students, and attention to mental health resources for affected students.

Review and Publicize Policies, Procedures, and Codes of Conduct

Policies, procedures, and codes of conduct are more than merely rules regarding the bounds of acceptable behavior. They are opportunities for schools to articulate school values and build communities of empathy and belonging. These guidelines should clearly prohibit discrimination and harassment in all district programs and activities, both in-person and online, including specific examples to help the school community better understand expected behavior. While acknowledging the need to respect students’ and faculty’s free speech rights, rules must emphasize the district’s obligation to respond to conduct that treats students differently based on race, color, or national origin (including shared ancestry) or creates a hostile learning environment on these grounds.

Specific Conduct Topics to Review:

- **Social media use by faculty/staff and students:** Social media use may implicate school policies on discrimination and harassment when posting or messaging is done during a district’s program or activity; while using a district’s computers, software, or email system; or when the effects of one person’s social media use interfere with another’s right to education. Codes of conduct should clearly outline what the school considers improper use of social media and school resources for faculty/staff and for students.

¹⁶ [AJC.org/WorkingDefinition](https://www.ajc.org/WorkingDefinition)

¹⁷ [AJC.org/WorkingDefinitionQuestionsAnswered](https://www.ajc.org/WorkingDefinitionQuestionsAnswered)

¹⁸ [AJC.org/AntisemitismReport2024/AmericanJews](https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2024/AmericanJews)

- **Rules regarding social media** use should be accompanied with in-school conversations about the appropriate and healthy use of social media, including understanding how algorithms promote hate, how to report hate or bias online, and how to assess what's true or not.
- **Protests and walkouts:** Establish and enforce [rules regarding protests and walkouts](#)¹⁹. While the First Amendment protects a student's right to protest, some types of protest activities such as sit-ins, walkouts, or classroom disturbances can also substantially disrupt learning, invade the rights of others, and exacerbate tensions within the school community. **The First Amendment allows reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of student speech in order to avoid disruptions and protect the rights of speakers and those who want to listen.** Restrictions that regulate the "time, place, and manner" of speech are acceptable if they are content-neutral and allow alternative avenues for communication. Clearly communicated guidelines respect constitutional rights and maintain positive learning environments for all students.
- **It is important to note** that cultural symbols, slogans, and imagery used within Israeli/Palestinian discourse can be co-opted in ways that promote antisemitic rhetoric. While many of these elements carry historical and cultural significance, some have been weaponized to demonize Jews, deny Jewish peoplehood, and delegitimize Israel. AJC educators are available to talk these through with you.

Ensure Physical Security

Verify that your school's security policies and procedures incorporate understanding and deterrence of antisemitic incidents, which often spike around elections, Jewish holidays, and when the conflict in the Middle East intensifies. The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel and its aftermath have led to a steep increase of threats and acts of violence toward Jews around the world, including in educational settings. In addition to local law enforcement, we encourage you to reach out to local Jewish community security organizations to obtain current security briefings and best practices.

Prioritize Support and Mental Health Concerns

Schools should be aware that in addition to Jewish students, educators and staff who are Jewish may also experience heightened emotional stress or even become direct targets of antisemitism, particularly during periods of global conflict involving Israel. Schools should proactively work to ensure that Jewish students and staff feel safe, heard, and valued within the school community.

Check the Calendar

Pay attention to Jewish holidays when planning ahead for major school programs, tests, sporting events, performances, field trips, or parent engagement programs to prevent scheduling conflicts and ensure that Jewish students and staff can fully participate in school life without having to choose between their religious observance and school commitments. Inclusion for Jewish students and faculty includes measures that accommodate those who cannot attend school on Jewish holidays due to religious observance, and efforts that raise awareness about Jewish practices, holidays, and dietary restrictions. Scheduling with Jewish holidays in mind requires a school's active attention, so AJC has created this short [Guide to Jewish Religion, Culture, and Holiday Observances](#)²⁰, which includes a 5-year calendar to help administrators and educators avoid scheduling conflicts and become better acquainted with key Jewish cultural practices.

Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM)

Integrate [Jewish American Heritage Month](#)²¹ (May) into school calendars through assemblies, student projects, and public displays of learning that promote awareness and appreciation of Jewish contributions to American society.

Provide Professional Development for Educators on Teaching and Discussing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Such workshops should emphasize best educational practices, including classrooms rooted in viewpoint diversity, fact-based inquiry, and the use of primary sources, which promote balanced, open, and respectful dialogue so that students can become knowledgeable global citizens. Our [team of experts](#)²² would be happy to deliver a workshop to provide educators with the foundational knowledge necessary to hold a classroom conversation and/or teach the conflict with empathy and attention to the multiple narratives held by those impacted by it. We can also refer you to trusted curriculum providers.

Empower Student Leaders to Connect

Meet with Jewish student leaders on a regular basis to check in on their well-being. If a Jewish Student Association (JSA) currently does not exist in your school, support Jewish students in their efforts to launch and sustain a JSA. Attend and encourage other administrators to participate in programming organized by Jewish student groups. Support Jewish student organizations and other student clubs to lead initiatives that foster dialogue, understanding, and allyship. Student voices are crucial to fostering a school culture where antisemitism is actively challenged by both peers and adults.

¹⁹ [AJC.org/K-12WalkoutGuidance](https://ajc.org/K-12WalkoutGuidance)

²⁰ [AJC.org/5YearCalendar](https://ajc.org/5YearCalendar)

²¹ [AJC.org/JAHM](https://ajc.org/JAHM)

²² education@ajc.org

Host Interfaith or Intergroup Panels

Facilitate structured forums for students to engage in ways that cultivate empathy and build bridges that support a strong school community. These discussions can ensure that Jewish identity is not treated solely as religious, but also cultural, ethnic, and national. Modeling dialogue across differences is key to helping prepare students to engage in difficult conversations. By observing or participating in civil discourse among individuals with differing views or backgrounds, students gain the listening and communication skills necessary to approach and navigate sensitive topics with nuance and respect. AJC is happy to consult with your school to ensure such conversations are planned thoughtfully and facilitated skillfully.

Emphasize Social Media Literacy and Safety

Conduct schoolwide [conversations](#)²³ about the appropriate and healthy use of social media and its impact. Students should understand how algorithms promote hateful content, how to report hate or bias online, and how to assess what's true or not.

Engage Parents and Community Leaders

Connect and meet with Jewish parents to provide a platform for open dialogue and support. Attend and encourage other administrators to participate in programming organized by Jewish parent affinity groups. Consider suggesting and creating opportunities for Jewish groups to collaborate with other parent groups and community stakeholders to foster empathy and dialogue. These gestures signal to the entire school community that Jews are welcome and seen, and that your school is working to better understand the needs and concerns of the Jewish community.

²³ [AJC.org/SocialMediaStudentGuidance](https://www.ajc.org/SocialMediaStudentGuidance)

Long Term Action Items

Access Federal and State Resources

Explore federal and state Title VI and school climate improvement materials, resources, and grants focused on anti-bias and student safety.

Conduct a Curriculum Audit

Studying the Jewish lived experiences and the contributions Jews have made to our world humanizes Jews and helps foster mutual respect. Assess where education about Jews and antisemitism currently exists in the curriculum and identify opportunities for improvement and expansion. Consider implementing a spiraling curriculum model, an approach aligned with the U.S. Department of Education's emphasis on developmentally appropriate instruction, which builds knowledge progressively over time and supports interdisciplinary integration. See our [Guidance for K-12 Schools to Ensure the Jewish Experience is Included Across the Curriculum](#)²⁴, and consider the following recommendations:

- **Incorporate Jewish history, literature, and culture** throughout the curriculum, particularly in social studies and ELA classes, to provide a deeper understanding of the Jewish people's experiences and challenges over time, including attention to Jewish contributions to society, culture, and science. Elevating Jewish voices fosters a sense of belonging and combats stereotypes.
- **Revisit Holocaust education, which must include learning about the long history of antisemitism**, including its distinctive features, historical manifestations, and contemporary expressions. By studying the history of antisemitism, including—*but not only*—the Holocaust, students can gain valuable insights into the history of discrimination and oppression, lessons about resilience, and the broader struggle for social justice.
- **Holocaust education should impart key understandings:** that a millennium-old Jewish civilization with unique cultural practices and a robust history was destroyed; that Jews resisted Nazi oppression through physical, cultural, and spiritual resistance; and that Nazi hatred was based on conspiratorial thinking that allowed for the dehumanization and demonization of Jews and other marginalized populations.
- Note: While over half (26) of the states in the U.S. [mandate some form of Holocaust education](#)²⁵, requirements vary. Be sure to know and adhere to state-mandated requirements and standards.

Add a unit in the high school history curriculum on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Consider introducing a unit on the Israel-Palestinian conflict that presents multiple narratives and nuanced perspectives about the history and present-day situation. Such a unit would help students examine complex issues with integrity, interpret source material responsibly, and prepare them academically to be informed and empathetic global citizens on their future college campus and as adults. [Our team of experts](#)²⁶ would be happy to work with you to help you design a curriculum and to recommend curricular providers who can offer specific training for educators.

Support Ongoing Educator Professional Development

Educators consistently report that they do not feel prepared to teach about Jews and antisemitism in the classroom. Provide support and opportunities for faculty to further their own education so they can teach accurately about Jews, Judaism, Jewish history, antisemitism, Israel, Zionism, and the Holocaust. Please reach out to us for recommendations on curricular providers.

[AJC's Center for Education Advocacy](#)²⁷ **is here to support you.**

Together, we can shape school communities that prepare all students to contribute to a more just and inclusive society. We look forward to partnering with you in this work.

Please reach out: education@ajc.org.

²⁴ [AJC.org/K-12CurriculumGuidance/JewishExperience](https://www.ajc.org/K-12CurriculumGuidance/JewishExperience)

²⁵ www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/where-holocaust-education-is-required-in-the-us

²⁶ education@ajc.org

²⁷ [AJC.org/CEA](https://www.ajc.org/CEA)

[American Jewish Committee \(AJC\)](#)²⁸ is the global advocacy organization for the Jewish people. With headquarters in New York and more than 75 offices, institutes, and international Jewish community partnerships worldwide, AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.

[AJC's Center for Education Advocacy \(CEA\)](#)²⁹ fosters academic environments that are inclusive of Jews and Jewish identity and refuse to allow the normalization of antisemitism in any form. Our [team](#)³⁰ of experienced educators provides strategic guidance and nuanced educational programs, and builds trusted relationships to work alongside higher education and K-12 institutions, educators, students, and parents to ensure schools prioritize critical thinking, viewpoint diversity, and fact-based inquiry—all values that strengthen civic society and democracy for the long term.

²⁸ [AJC.org](https://www.ajc.org)

²⁹ [AJC.org/CEA](https://www.ajc.org/CEA)

³⁰ education@ajc.org