

# Implementing the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism in K-12 Schools:

A Guide for Education Professionals, State Education Departments, & School Administrators



Following the release of the [U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism \(National Strategy\)](#) by the White House in May 2023, ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) created this toolkit to help support education professionals in implementing as many of the below recommendations as possible in order to help create safe and welcoming learning environments for Jewish students in K-12 schools.

The National Strategy represents the most comprehensive and ambitious federal government effort to counter antisemitism in U.S. history, and urges action from all sectors of society—including professionals who help shape education policy, and who serve as administrators in school districts and as educators in K-12 schools. It was created at a time of [rising antisemitism](#) in schools across the country, fueled by dangerous conspiracy theories that seek to chip away at our most cherished democratic values. As set forth in the National Strategy, we all have a role to play in confronting antisemitism early and aggressively, whenever and wherever it emerges.

As a leading provider of antisemitism and anti-bias education for students and educators in K-12 schools, ADL is ready to support school districts and education professionals across the country in this critical work. For more information about ADL and our educational programming and resources, please visit us at [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org) or [contact us directly](#).

## Recommendation 1

### Define Antisemitism

As set forth in the National Strategy, antisemitism is a complex and nuanced form of oppression that is often not well understood. This is in large part because antisemitism is more than just a form of religious hatred. It often takes the form of a [racialized bigotry](#) (e.g., swastikas, Nazi salutes, Holocaust jokes based on white supremacist ideology), or bigotry grounded in [conspiracy theories](#) (e.g., conspiracies featuring myths about [Jewish power and control](#)). And it can also manifest in the form of [anti-Zionist](#)<sup>1</sup> harassment or discrimination (e.g., excluding Jewish students from school activities based on their actual or perceived historic, cultural, religious, and/or ethnic identification with Israel).

Because antisemitism can take on many forms, defining it can be difficult. However, the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) Working Definition](#) has become the preeminent definitional tool used to evaluate manifestations of antisemitism today, and it includes useful examples of discriminatory anti-Israel acts that cross the line into antisemitism. It is also the definition that the U.S. Department of Education is required to consider when investigating complaints of antisemitic discrimination in K-12 schools.

We urge school districts across the country to use the [IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in education programming and when responding to reports of antisemitic harassment or discrimination in K-12 schools](#).

1. Zionism is the movement for self-determination and statehood of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel. For most Jews, a connection to Israel is an intrinsic part of their identity. A [2021 Pew Research Center Survey of Jewish Americans](#) found that at least 80% of American Jews say that Israel is an essential or important part of their Jewish identity.



## Recommendation 2

### Educate Students, Teachers, and Staff About Antisemitism + Jewish Identity, Life, and Culture

Unfortunately, despite its longevity and persistence today, antisemitism is still very often misunderstood and overlooked in programming focused on countering bias and fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in K-12 schools. At the same time, many school districts either do not include in their curriculum content focused on Jewish history, identity, and culture, or have **proposed or considered content** that veers into antisemitism and/or extreme anti-Israel bias. This is particularly concerning at a time of rising antisemitic incidents across the country. According to ADL's most recent **Audit of Antisemitic Incidents**, for example, in 2022 there was a 49% increase in reported incidents in K-12 schools across the U.S.

ADL has a wealth of resources and **lesson plans** available on our website that focus on helping students and educators understand antisemitism and Jewish identity, from both a historic and contemporary perspective. Examples include the following:

- A digital mini-lesson, **Antisemitism: What do Educators Need to Know**, to help educators understand antisemitism and how to speak about the topic of antisemitism.

- Lesson Plans, including "**Historical Antisemitism**," and "**Contemporary Antisemitism**"
- **Student activities**, including "What is Antisemitism?" and "Why Didn't Antisemitism End After the Holocaust."
- An interactive, facilitated workshop (virtual or in person) designed to educate students and teachers about general anti-bias issues, including Jewish identity and antisemitism through an anti-bias lens.
- A K-12 resource focused on teaching about **Jewish American Heritage Month**.

We urge school districts to formally include antisemitism awareness education in all anti-bias and non-discrimination programming; to incorporate into the curriculum content focused on Jewish history and identity; to take steps to ensure that antisemitic content does not make its way into the classroom or curriculum; and to provide mandatory professional development trainings for all educators regarding the same.



## Recommendation 3

### Offer Robust Holocaust and Genocide Education

Holocaust and genocide education is an effective, proven lever to combat antisemitism in society; and yet, unfortunately, the Holocaust is still not universally taught in schools across the U.S. It is therefore not surprising that **recent surveys** have found an alarming lack of knowledge about the Holocaust among younger generations. This is deeply concerning, as the latest **research** from ADL's Center for Antisemitism Research (CAR) suggests a **direct relationship** between deficiencies in Holocaust education and an increase in prejudicial, antisemitic beliefs.

Fortunately, there is broad public support for expanding Holocaust education: **A 2023 ADL survey** revealed that more than 90 percent of Americans believe high school students should learn about the Holocaust, with 87 percent agreeing that high school students should learn about antisemitism throughout history and in the present. At the same time, **a recent ADL poll** looking at antisemitic

attitudes in America found that respondents whose schools taught specifically about the Holocaust harbored the least antisemitic prejudice, compared to those who learned about the Holocaust elsewhere.

ADL remains committed to expanding and enhancing the availability of Holocaust education across the nation through its **Echoes & Reflections** program. We also recently launched a "**Learn to Never Forget**" campaign to encourage expansion of Holocaust education across the country and to encourage states that already offer Holocaust education to audit their programming to ensure its effectiveness.

We urge school districts across the country to adopt and/or expand their Holocaust and genocide curricular offerings, to ensure current and future generations understand the importance of confronting antisemitism and hate and the dangers of remaining silent.



## Recommendation 4

### Provide Professional Development Opportunities and Support to Educators

Given the complex and sensitive nature of topics like the Holocaust, global antisemitism, and Jewish history and identity, it is critically important that educators are given the tools they need to teach such topics accurately, compassionately, and effectively. This includes robust professional development so that educators can effectively present this material to students in an age-appropriate manner. Such resources and support are also absolutely critical to preventing the introduction of biased content in the classroom that reflects or promotes antisemitic ideas or beliefs. Learn more [here](#).

We urge school districts to provide teachers with the support and resources they need, including robust curricula and professional development trainings, in order to effectively teach about antisemitism and the Holocaust and ensure that antisemitic or biased content does not make its way into the classroom.



## Recommendation 5

### Ensure Compliance with Non-Discrimination Protections under Title VI

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) protects all students, including Jewish students, from discrimination and harassment based on their actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics. We encourage school administrators and educators to review the most recent [Dear Colleague Letter](#) from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) on schools' obligations under Title VI to address discrimination against Jewish students. OCR has additional Fact Sheets on [Protecting Students from Discrimination Based on Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics](#) and [Combating Discrimination Against Jewish Students](#) which provide specific examples of school action or inaction that could potentially violate Title VI, and you may find OCR's [Questions and Answers on Executive Order 13899 \(Combating Anti-Semitism\) and OCR's Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) to be particularly useful.

Consistent with the National Strategy, OCR is launching an Antisemitism Awareness Campaign aimed at raising awareness among educators, students, parents, and communities about the alarming rise of antisemitism and giving them tools to address it. OCR will also continue to vigorously enforce Title VI, including by taking allegations of a school district's failure to address antisemitic harassment seriously.

**CASE STUDY:** In August 2022, OCR and Kyrene School District #28 in Arizona entered into a [Resolution Agreement](#) in response to allegations that Kyrene failed to appropriately respond to reports of on-going antisemitic harassment of a Jewish student, including antisemitic slurs and disparaging jokes about her Jewish heritage. The harassment reportedly spanned over the course of five months, both in school and on social media. The investigation found that the district failed to assess whether this harassment negatively impacted other students and failed to take any school-wide measures to address the antisemitic harassment, until several months had passed, allowing the potentially hostile environment to persist. As part of the Resolution Agreement, the school district made a commitment to review and revise policies and procedures to address harassment, provide training to district staff regarding the district's obligations to respond to complaints of harassment, and to conduct a climate survey.

We urge school districts across the country to review their obligations under Title VI (and other similar state laws) to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment; to take full advantage of OCR's technical assistance, resources, and trainings regarding Title VI; and to educate students and teachers regarding the same.



## Recommendation 6

### Ensure Comprehensive Policies & a Robust Process for Responding to Antisemitism in Schools

It is critical that all school districts have clear and transparent non-discrimination, anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies; clear and transparent mechanisms for students, parents, teachers, and support staff to report hate incidents and acts of antisemitism to school administrators; and clear and transparent communication protocols so that students and families are consistently informed about the steps taken in response to reported incidents.

ADL has several resources to assist school districts in addressing bias incidents, including:

- Our [Responding to Bias Incidents in Middle and High Schools](#) best practices guide for school administrators and educators.
- Our [School Sports and Bias Toolkit](#), which provides best practices and resources for athletic directors, coaches, and school administrators.
- Our [Mini-Course: Responding to Bias Incidents in K-12 Schools](#) which is designed to help educators explore best practices in responding to incidents of bias in schools.

We urge school districts to ensure that robust and comprehensive policies and protocols are in place, consistent with state and federal law, to effectively respond to antisemitic discrimination, harassment and bullying in K-12 schools; and to take steps to ensure full transparency regarding these policies.



## Recommendation 7

### Speak Out & Take Action When Antisemitism Takes Place

The National Strategy calls upon schools to issue clear and unwavering statements condemning antisemitism in the wake of antisemitic incidents, and to treat antisemitism with the same seriousness as other forms of hate. When a school district experiences an antisemitic incident, one of the most important steps that district and school leadership can take is to call it out swiftly, clearly and directly. And when Jewish students are subjected to a hostile environment based on harassment, discrimination, or exclusion, school district leadership should be prepared to make clear that such actions will be investigated and addressed. Antisemitic behavior, regardless of the source and regardless of whether or not it constitutes protected speech, causes real harm – not simply hurt feelings – to both the targeted student(s) and the community as a whole.

It is important to remember that in many cases, schools will need to also take action to remedy the hostile environment in the wake of an incident. In addition to

speaking out, remedial steps could include offering counseling to the offending students regarding the harmful effect of their conduct and/or hosting a school assembly to discuss antisemitism and its harmful impact. In addition, school districts can provide training to teachers and other administrators, including the district's leadership team, regarding how to recognize and address antisemitic incidents and respond in the moment; create an age-appropriate program to educate students about the history and dangers of antisemitism; and/or conduct outreach to involve parents and community groups (like the ADL) to prevent future antisemitic harassment. In fact, depending on the underlying facts, some of these steps may be required as a matter of law.

We urge school and district leadership to speak out strongly and unequivocally in the wake of antisemitic incidents, and to take appropriate remedial actions in response.



# Recommendation 8

## Ensure Adequate Accommodations for Jewish Students

In order to create welcoming and inclusive learning environments, and consistent with the National Strategy, school districts should take reasonable steps to accommodate students' religious observances and beliefs.

For example, schools can and should reasonably accommodate students who may miss school for a religious observance. This includes providing students with an excused absence and a reasonable amount of time to make up any missed work. To the maximum extent possible, teachers, athletic directors, and other programmatic heads should be encouraged to avoid scheduling major events (tests, tryouts, etc.) on religious holidays like the Jewish Sabbath and the Jewish High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). Every year,

ADL publishes a [Calendar of Observances](#) to help schools and other stakeholders avoid such conflicts.

Schools should also exercise great care when crafting student dress codes and policies, to avoid targeting religious attire in general, or the attire of a particular religion, for prohibition or regulation. And, schools should take steps to provide reasonable accommodations to support students with dietary needs due to religious beliefs or observances.

We urge state education departments and school districts to review and/or update their religious accommodation policies or guidelines to help foster equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

**ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all.**





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