

Sunday May 26, 2024

Dear Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,

I've been a proud public elementary school teacher for 20 years. I hold many awards and accolades for my dedication to education, including the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in 2022<sup>1</sup>. To say that I love my job would be an understatement. However, what I've witnessed and experienced over the past 3 years, and even more so since October 7th has shook me to my core. This unprecedented increase of hate toward Jewish students, staff, and families in public schools is being dismissed and ignored.<sup>2</sup>

People often ask why I continue speaking up knowing I've become a primary target of antisemites. I think the more important question is - how can I not? **We are in a crisis.** Not only is antisemitism being normalized in schools, but since October 7th, it's now being taught and encouraged. It is our responsibility as Canadians to ensure that everyone belongs in our publicly funded schools. Of course it would be easier for Jews to relocate, hide our Jewish identity, or stay silent out of fear. But we can't. And we won't. I'm the 1st grandchild of a Holocaust Survivor. I know this is where we belong because we belong **everywhere.**

Children as young as 4 years old are being harassed, gaslight, threatened, and attacked simply for being Jewish. Here are a few examples of student experiences over the past 2 years.

- 1) Teachers showing inaccurate videos of hate towards Israel while encouraging their students to BOO whenever our Israeli flag comes on the screen.
- 2) Teachers erasing Israel from the map entirely and replacing it with Palestine. Then inviting the community to come celebrate their equity night while Educators and NDP MPPs Tweet Pictures beside the flag promoting inclusivity.
- 3) Educators mocking students for attending a Jewish elementary school and then laughing at them for their "white privilege"
- 4) Educators teaching the Holocaust by instructing students to close hide under their desks pretending they are in a gas chamber about to be executed
- 5) Students creating social media groups and posting pictures of all Jewish students in their school encouraging others to hurt them. "You're either with us or with the Jews."
- 6) Students giving presentations praising Hitler's leadership, saying he only failed because he didn't finish the job. I found this one while doing a google drive search for my late Grandfather's Holocaust education speech.
- 7) At a graduation ceremony, a student who previously harassed Jewish peers on several occasions, was given the honour of reciting the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement only to alter it by including antiZionist hate, blaming Jews for killing all of her people. This was posted on social media by her proud parents...as Jewish parents in the crowd spent their child's graduation crying to me on the phone when the Principal didn't feel it was problematic
- 8) Students playing "choke the Jew" while piling on top of one another to symbolize the dead bodies after being gassed in concentration camps. Don't forget to take the picture when you get the Jewish kid on top!
- 9) Jewish students expected to educate their educators only to then be told what is and isn't their identity.
- 10) Being shoved into lockers while mocked, sworn at, spat on, called a Dirty Jew, and being told to stick with their own kind.
- 11) Being threatened with a knife while hearing chants of BOO JEW while trying to run track. Being pushed into the changeroom having swastikas thrown in their faces.
- 12) Shoved down to the muddy floor of the yellow school bus and told to "taste what their Grandparents tasted" in the Holocaust.
- 13) Regularly getting Heil Hitler salutes while being asked about a preferred flavour of gas because their parents have gas chambers awaiting them in their basements if they don't do what they say.

The normalization of antisemitism in schools has become so prominent that Jewish students have given up. They're regularly dismissed by trusted adults and then targeted by their peers so can you blame them? Jewish students are hearing their teachers insist that they "let things go." And their non-Jewish friends are watching and learning that Jews Don't

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction to me please see: <https://www.endjewhatred.ca/post/lisa-levitan-ottawa-public-school-teacher> I am also the Chair of Rise Up Ottawa and to learn more about Rise Up Ottawa please see <https://www.caef.ca/amp/ottawa-rose-up-to-learn-engage-celebrate-and-take-action>

<sup>2</sup> Please read the October 15, 2023 article that appeared in the Ottawa Citizen that discussed two demonstrations that took place in Ottawa shortly after October 7<sup>th</sup> <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/marchers-supporting-gaza-israel-stage-two-demonstrations-in-capital>

Count. The lack of understanding of our Jewish history is not a valid argument. Allowing protests with chants of From River to the Sea, Death to Zionists, and Long Live the Intifada on school property during school hours **is antisemitism**. This is not free speech. This is hate speech. Hate has no place in Canada, and certainly not in our schools. I am a Jew. I am indigenous to my homeland of Israel. When you hurt Israel, you hurt me. Every. Single. Time. **Stop using semantics to shield your antisemitism.**

**Stop doing things for us, without us.** Stop spending tens of thousands of dollars hiring someone to help make your inactions acceptable. We are here. Begging for you to let us help you. Spend that money on immediate mandatory antisemitism PD for all Canadian staff and students - the same way you've done for other marginalized groups. We are the professional Jewish Educators living in the classrooms every day. **Let us help you HELP these kids.** What you're allowing in schools is not working. I've never seen more division among our youngest minds of tomorrow. I implore the Government to demand that all Canadian Directors of Education implement a building bridges program and bring back the 0-hate tolerance policy today. **It's time to clean up our schools!!!**

STOP.

LISTEN.

SUPPORT US.

CONSEQUENCE HATE.

CONDEMN TERRORISM.

EDUCATE.

Hate is hate, and it must include antisemitism. The regular celebrations and calls for our death in our Ottawa streets are not peaceful. Calling for an Intifada, burning Israeli and Canadian flags, celebrating October 7th. Our students are learning to participate in such extremism from their parents and the community who by not stopping it, are complicit. The hate for Jews runs so deep that they have lost their humanity.

This is not normal.

This is not okay.

We are not okay.

You don't have to be Jewish to stand up for Jews!

While we regularly speak of the unconscionable hate happening on college campuses, respectfully, you're missing the mark. What you're seeing now comes from the education these students received when they were young. I cannot believe I have parents telling their children they're not allowed to play with "the Jewish kid." I cannot believe that immediately following October 7th, the Jews - the victims who were raped, burned, decapitated and tortured by Hamas terrorists - weren't met with compassion and understanding. Instead, we the Jews in the diaspora are facing more hate than we've ever seen in our lifetime. What happened to the 0-hate tolerance policies in schools? Where are the police? How many more Jewish families have to move their children to the Catholic Board for safety? The happenings in our elementary and secondary schools are vile and as teachers, we're silenced and isolated with the understanding that should we speak up, we will lose our jobs. This is antisemitism in 2024.

Teaching is my heart, but being Jewish is my identity. I will never waiver when I see innocent children needing safety and support in our schools. My advocacy has and continues to come at a huge cost. While I am an exceptional educator, my job will never solely consist of an academic curriculum. I've been hired to help children believe in themselves and succeed in all areas of development. I take this responsibility very seriously. I will continue educating educators attempting to keep Jewish students safe while all odds are stacked against me. I will not stop until you recognize that we are not going anywhere because Jews Do Count.

In the end, I'm no one special. I'm not a politician or a celebrity. I don't come from a wealthy family. I'm just a Grade 2 teacher who remains shocked to witness and experience antisemitism happening in our public schools and I say NO. We must not hide. We must not run away. We must not combat hate with hate. We must come together and Rise Up because 'Never Again' is right now.

I thank MP Anthony Housefather, Marco Mendicino, Melissa Lantsman, and Kevin Vuong for their unwavering support against Jewish hate. Immense appreciation to Deborah Lyons for her hard work towards what I'm sure she never expected

when initially taking this job. To all other MPs, I expect you to do what you were elected to do - keep Canadians safe. **Free speech is not Hate speech.** Put an immediate stop to these unimaginable living conditions. We've been here before. It was called the Holocaust. When you know better, you do better. I will be waiting to see ACTION.

Please take the time to listen to just a few Jewish students<sup>3</sup>' experiences, as well as David Sachs<sup>4</sup> who lists a number of troubling incidents in our Ottawa elementary and secondary schools. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XLZ-qV2NzY>

45:54 - AA (Grade 12)

54:17 - BB (Grade 7)

1:00:32 - CC (Grade 10)

1:07:21 - DD (1st year University of Queens student)

1:14:00 - EE (2nd year Wilfred Laurier University student)

2:45:31 - FF (Jewish parent of elementary and high school students)

2:52:59 - David Sachs (Jewish Federation of Ottawa, Antisemitism Specialist)

2:17:12 - Ontario Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce

Other delegations you're welcome to watch in this video:

Former Ambassador of Israel in Canada, Dr. Ronen Hoffman

Former Special Envoy to Combating Antisemitism and Preserving Holocaust Education, Professor Irwin Cotler

Ontario Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce

Chief Executive Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), Shimon Fogel

Founder and CEO of End Jew Hatred and the Lawfare Project, Brooke Goldstein

Lawfare Senior Counsel, Gerard Filliti

MP Anthony Housefather

MP Melissa Lantsman

MP Yasir Nakvi

MP Anita Vandenberg

National Director B'nai Brith Canada, Sam Goldstein

Vice President Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation Michael Teper

Former Defence Attache to Canada, Colonel Amiram Jakira

Former President Jewish Federation of Ottawa, Andrea Freedman

Congregation Machzikei Hadas, Rabbi Idan Scher

Former President Ottawa Jewish Community School, Aaron Smith

Please take the time to read:

- Ronnie Frankel's opinion piece published in the Ottawa Citizen on July 8, 2022 about experiences as a high school student: <https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/frenkel-as-a-jewish-student-in-ottawa-i-experienced-antisemitism-first-hand>
- *"It's so normalized": Jewish students, teachers confront rising antisemitism* published in the Capital Current. See <https://capitalcurrent.ca/its-so-normalized-jewish-students-teachers-confront-rising-antisemitism/>

Please take the time to listen to:

- The discussion I had with Patricia Boal of Ottawa at Work following an antisemitic event at Sir Robert Borden High School in Ottawa: [https://omny.fm/shows/580-cfra/ottawa-at-work-lisa-levitan-we-must-have-appropriain\\_playlist=clips-ottawa-at-work&cloudflare-language=](https://omny.fm/shows/580-cfra/ottawa-at-work-lisa-levitan-we-must-have-appropriain_playlist=clips-ottawa-at-work&cloudflare-language=)

It is our duty to ensure that every student belongs while feeling safe and included in our publicly funded schools. I hope to meet with you at your earliest convenience so that I may be of assistance in cleaning up our Canadian schools.

Sincerely,

*Lisa Levitan*

Ottawa Against Antisemitism #EndJewHatred

Member of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism (ALCCA)

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the students are anonymized to safeguard their privacy. The reproduction of their names elsewhere in material associated with this written brief is done with the permission of those involved and where the student is a minor with the permission of the parent or guardian.

<sup>4</sup> Name reproduced only with the permission of the individual involved.