

1.0 OVERVIEW

1.1 About JEFA

The Jewish Educators and Family Association of Canada (JEFA) is a registered not-for-profit corporation that was born out of necessity to represent Jewish educators, students and their families, in the K-12 school system. Its founding members represent licenced educators, parents and education experts who felt compelled to respond to the precipitous increase in antisemitism in our education system. For more information, please go to JEFA.ca.

1.2 Highlights of The Jewish Experience in K-12

Antisemitism is rampant and normalized throughout Canada's K-12 education system. This submission presents a small subset of the totality of issues, including the following highlights:

1. Following continued inaction by the TDSB, after receiving a petition from nearly 5000 parents¹, approximately 300 people come together to walk a child to school to help keep him safe².
2. School Board decision-making relating to equity and anti-hate resourcing is based on student achievement and is "focused on students who are underserved and underperforming."
3. Holocaust education, including holocaust survivors, are routinely cancelled under public pressure and teachers have been directed by admins to "teach both sides of antisemitism."

2.0 THE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Jewish day schools are Canada's top target of domestic terrorism. In the last year there have been at least four violent attacks on Jewish day schools including a brazen shooting by multiple gunman at Bais Chaya Mushka School for Girls just this week³. Bomb threats are an unfortunately common occurrence and one Jewish school in Montreal was targeted by shooters on multiple occasions⁴.

These purpose-driven acts of terror clearly indicate the targeted and violent nature of anti-Jewish hate in Canada.

Recommendations: (1) Emergency funding for security for Jewish schools and institutions; (2) short-term increase in police funding in all major cities, and; (3) long-term enhanced domestic terrorism focus on addressing antisemitic groups targeting Jewish institutions.

3.0 THE JEWISH STUDENT EXPERIENCE

3.1 In the Classroom

School Boards have placed "identity affirmation" above the principle that students should be educated at school, not indoctrinated. Political ideology in class has become standard, such as:

- Wearing political clothing: shirts with the map of Israel coloured with a watermelon, "Free Palestine" bracelets, earrings, etc. and keffiyehs, including one teacher who wore a keffiyeh to a field trip at the Toronto Holocaust Museum.

¹ <https://www.change.org/p/stop-antisemitism-in-toronto-s-schools>

² <https://nationalpost.com/news/community-support-walk-held-for-bullied-jewish-student-at-toronto-school>

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/police-suspects-gunfire-jewish-girls-school-1.7215118>

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/montreal-jewish-school-targeted-shooting-2nd-time-week/story?id=104832890>

- The repeated promotion of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement, including multiple instances of it being promoted, and Israel accused of ethnic cleansing and genocide, immediately following or as part of holocaust education.
- Classrooms are replete with political materials including: Palestinian flags, maps of Israel painted over with a Palestinian flag or watermelon colours, Ceasefire Now poster etc..
- Educators boast about fulfilling their moral obligation to teach propaganda to children, including one kindergarten teacher boasting online about speaking to their students about how the “children of Palestine” are “targeted” and killed by Israel.
- A shocking school-wide “Palestine Art contest” that called for students to mobilize against Israel “bombing.. hospitals with children and doctors inside”⁵.
- School libraries include inappropriate books like “Baba, what does my name mean”, which is a child’s picture book that calls for the primary-aged reader to draw a map of “Palestine from the river to the sea”.

Recommendations - (1) Recognize the dissemination of terror propaganda to minors as child abuse; (2) Conduct a national inquiry into political indoctrination, and incorporation of personal worldviews and political ideologies, in the public school setting, and; (3) recognize “from river to sea”, and other similar remarks, as hate speech, rather than their current status of ‘identity affirming’ content for children’s picture books.

3.2 In the Yard

In the schoolyard Jewish students are harassed, intimidated, and bullied by their classmates, and their persecutors do not experience meaningful consequences. Jewish students are scared, and parents do not have confidence that the school boards are able to protect their children. A very small number of incidents garner media attention because parents are concerned that coming forward will increase the targeted harassment of their children. Examples of some troubling incidents include:

- An Israeli-Canadian teen was viciously attacked during school hours in New Brunswick⁶
- Israeli student is repeatedly bullied, told that they will do to him “what Hamas did to Israel”
- Reports of parents removing their Jewish children from public school, including this parent who spoke publicly about some of the issues faced by her child⁷
- FOI obtained PDSB records reveal “around 40 students swarmed” a child shouting “Jews deserve to die”

Recommendations - Advocate for (1) primacy of student safety over consideration of impact of consequences on aggressor students; and (2) no differential disciplinary treatment of ‘racialized groups’ in context of hate offences, as this practice tolerates and foments hate.

4.0 INEQUITABLE SCHOOL BOARD EQUITY PRACTICES

Human rights policies have seemingly succumbed to mob rule and school board bureaucracy as opposed to upholding their original purpose of helping minorities susceptible to persecution. Today’s school boards, despite not having the staff with the requisite qualifications to do so, routinely engage in the development of human rights policies. Too often guided by public pressure, the policies lack thoughtful deliberation. It is inherently inequitable for children to have different human rights depending on which school board they attend.

For example, while the Province of Ontario has adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, only a single school board in Ontario has accepted it. Jewish students living streets apart have different rights and protections at their schools. It is worth noting that the school board that has adopted the IHRA definition has received a petition from thousand of parents in regards to its poor implementation.⁸ Failure to both educate on IHRA and consider its impacts on other school policies, such as those relating to “student voice” and “identity affirmation” is vital.

⁵ <https://x.com/OliveAuJus/status/1781503071723384986?t=dbtVCUoT7Qz15lzI8VWf1A&s=19>

⁶ <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/israeli-teenager-says-she-was-attacked-at-new-brunswick-school-for-being-jewish>

⁷ https://x.com/neveragainlive1/status/1794370958704418871?t=n_gip9DCzvZHtafnrW6UWw&s=19

⁸ <https://www.change.org/p/urgent-action-needed-by-tdsb-to-address-antisemitism>

In contrast to the failed implementation of the IHRA definition, multiple school boards within Ontario have begun implementing Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) training, for staff students and trustees, with the eye to its adoption as a protected equity class. Despite APR being virtually non-existent in most school board incident reporting systems and not being formally adopted by any level of Government, Equity department staff and a small group of vocal community members⁹ have been fiercely advocating for its official and unofficial implementation.

APR is a proposed category of hate and discrimination that requires thoughtful deliberation because it expands on the concept of discrimination in two very unique ways: First, it would be the first category of racism to apply to a nation-seeking group. Currently, there is no protected equity class for Anti-Kurdish Racism or Anti-Yazeedi Racism, as examples. APR is inherently geopolitical. Secondly, this is the only form of hate that captures “narratives”; differences of opinion in relation to geopolitical issues become discriminatory. Some of the examples of “narratives” identified as protected speech in APR training documents for TDSB staff¹⁰ include references to:

- Assigning genocidal or violent intent to the phrase “Free Palestine, from the river to the sea”, which the APR training frames as ‘hopeful Palestinian poetry’
- Asking why other Arab countries don’t help Palestinians is considered an example of APR
- Asking someone to denounce Hamas and Hezbollah as a means of testing the “acceptability” of their views on the Middle East conflict is also considered an example of APR.

APR disproportionately targets as racist anyone who believes in Israel’s right to exist, aka Jewry.

Recommendations – Need to evaluate the establishment and implementation of human rights and equity policies in the public school system to ensure consistency and that it is developed in accordance with established principles, rather than mobs and ill-trained bureaucracy.

5.0 STUDENTS AND PARENTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

At the request of the families involved, these quotations are being provided anonymously.

“I am a middle school student who has been told by many of my teachers that if there is a time that I feel afraid because of anti-Jewish rhetoric or situations at my school that there are only some safe teachers and vice-principal/principal to go to and they have told me who I cannot speak to as they will not help. In one case, my vice-principal/principal was actively involved in creating the momentum needed to have protests in the school. This has made the climate in the school horrible as a Jewish student. I feel unsafe sharing my Jewish identity in my school so I avoid doing anything where my identity might be revealed.”

“Every class I am in, someone says something antisemitic”

“I am afraid to let anyone know I am Jewish”

“For months our child was repeatedly harassed, physically intimidated, assaulted on top of being told by students that Jews did not deserve to live. Time after time we were assured that our child was safe in the school, yet the incidents kept happening. After the second physical assault we had to pull our child from the school for their safety because it was clear that the school did not have the situation under control at all. Now my child feels that the only way to survive in our school systems is to hide their Jewish identity.”

“Our experiences at our childrens' highschool has been isolating and have left our children ostracized. The student body and surrounding community are vocal about being anti-Zionist. Jew hatred is prevalent, with swastikas drawn and derogatory Antisemitic statements being voiced in the hallways, locker rooms and bathrooms. Attempts to educate the students were met with refusals to attend and protests by the student body.”

Since Oct 7 I've had a hard time going to school. Mentally I have had to prepare myself each morning. It started with student walk outs and books about Palestine in the library. Then another student telling my friends not to trust me because I'm Jewish. Then this cultural event with all the kids wearing keffiyehs and saying that Israel doesn't exist and wearing flags and t shirts with Israel but labelled Palestine. It's like I don't exist. If I were to wear any symbol like a Star of David I feel like I would be beat up. I can't show I'm Jewish.

⁹https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/parents-urge-toronto-school-board-to-combat-anti-palestinian-racism-and-observe-nakba-day/article_d1435e40-12c1-11ef-b935-53d9e25022ab.html

¹⁰https://x.com/Fairness_in_Ed/status/1790431551701835816?t=i3ctrffZog1fn-0x0p_zdA&s=19

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1.2 Highlights of The Jewish Educators Experience

Jewish educators throughout Canada's K-12 education system work in a system that has normalized antisemitism and many fear being identified as Jewish at work. From the onset of their career pursuits, a strong anti-Israel narrative is woven through the philosophies of "decolonization" and "student voice." As examples,

- Decolonization is the zeitgeist that drives virtually all aspects of teacher education, including how math and science are taught. This includes, for example, "Settler Colonialism & Pedagogies of Liberation", a course offered to prospective teachers at OISE, which encourages students to learn "through the lens of settler colonial studies.... Topics covered include Land theft/occupation.... Students will be encouraged to make connections between ... other settler colonial contexts, such as ... Palestine/Israel"
- While protests with genocidal chants take place within earshot of school buildings to honour Palestinian "student voice," Jewish "student voice" is silenced. Bullied and intimidated, Jewish students fear speaking up and when they do so they are often dismissed. Consider that in 2023-4 in the same city, pro-Palestinians speakers were welcomed at one school while teenage Israeli speakers were told they were not welcome at another. Jewish students are silently leaving our public schools out of fear.

2.0 THE EDUCATOR'S EXPERIENCE

2.1 In the Classroom and the Staffroom

Jewish educators feel isolated, targeted and abandoned. Increasingly the target of harassment by students, colleagues and parents, an unacceptably high number of Jewish educators feel compelled to keep their identity hidden. Sadly, their school board employers are too often complicit. Consider these examples:

- The lone Jewish staff in a school prepares a Jewish heritage display that includes an Israeli flag. A parent objects and posts a video and statement online threatening to expose the name of the school and "all involved" if the flag is not removed by a certain date. When the flag is not removed on time the school's name and identity of the teacher are posted to tens of thousands of followers who in turn repost to thousands more. The teacher is forced out of the school for her safety and ultimately the flag is removed.
- A teacher with a compelling record with the board is encouraged by several of her previous principals to apply to become a school administrator. During the interview process she is asked about her work in advocating for human rights to which she responds with an extensive resume of work in fighting antisemitism. The teacher is turned down for the role and during the debrief is told that she didn't provide enough evidence of human rights work.

- In 2021, a TDSB Equity Advisor circulated to thousands of teachers materials to help them teach Palestine in their classrooms¹. These materials included links to and resources from designated terror organizations. It is unknown how many children were exposed to these terrorist propagand materials.
- A teacher was disturbed that students intended to include the phrase “Free Palestine, from the river to the sea” as part of a class musical performance. After raising the issue, the teacher was directed by the Human Rights Office to permit the phrase to be used.

Teachers are especially concerned that school boards are not even identifying what is occurring as antisemitism. This lack of understanding, knowledge, and support, is, in large part, due to lack of adequate education and training. Antisemitism training for school board staff is optional, and there are persistent reports that the only attendees at antisemitism training are Jewish teachers and a small number of allies.

Recommendation - Funding and the adoption of Mandatory Contemporary Antisemitism Professional Development. See this teacher-led initiative at www.MCAPD.ca

2.2 In the Union

Education, and especially publicly funded education, is considered to be among the most unionized environments in the world. And yet, Jewish teachers feel vulnerable and abandoned by the very organization that is tasked with advocating for their safety. Consider the below statements, reported verbatim, from licensed educators.

The experiences of our Jewish educators clearly demonstrates that current labour laws do not adequately account for these issues. Deeper inquiry and probing of current laws is required.

Recommendation - Inquiry into whether:

- The violation of a person's right not to associate is unduly infringed in the context of their Unions' participation in activities and activism, including the expenditure of union dues in pursuit thereof, unrelated to the employment/labour context; and
- Union members should be able to divert their union dues where there has been a demonstration of their Union failing to uphold and pursue human rights issues, in the context of their employment and union membership, affecting that individual or the group to which that individual belongs.

3.0 EDUCATORS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

At the request of the educators involved and out of respect for their safety, these quotations are being provided anonymously.

"The unrelenting antisemitic rhetoric from our union leader and some executives who I am required to work with for support demonstrates a bias that undermines their ability to conduct their duties in an objective and equitable manner. It is extremely disturbing to be part of a union that appears to have a political agenda, which has the effect of isolating and threatening Jewish people."

"I am scared that while Jews are getting more hate than any other minority, we have none of the protections our nation, board, and union provides to other minorities. Children have told me proudly that hating Jews (as well as Roma and GLBTQ2S people) is their culture and therefore needs to be respected and cannot be criticized. What backup do I have to communicate that hate towards us is not a Canadian value and not tolerated in our public schools? We are a very small group, less than one thousandth of the world population, only 1.4% of the Canadian population. That means many Canadian children won't know any Jews to give a human face to the news stories and folk tales. Students have told me they think Jews are mythical creatures with evil magical powers and horns and

Union

Fear of
identifying as
Jew/ Student
hate

¹ https://www.cija.ca/tdsb_reinstates_staff_member_who_distributed_terrorist_materials

they are surprised they really exist. But because I am afraid of false accusations and violence, my students won't know that I am a Jew. I am afraid we cannot bring our true selves to the classroom."

Hate in staffroom and classroom

"I worry that every single staff meeting teachers are grouped into two categories: oppressed and a white supremacist. I worry that a Hitler salute by young students will be the new normal. I worry that with APR, there is no future for Jewish people because students will be taught at a very young age to despise Israel and Jewish people."

Jews are White Supremacists

"Being told we are racist and are considered white supremacists when myself and so many of my Jewish colleagues suffer some of the worst forms of hate in North America because we are Jewish. If Hitler was here today, he would bypass my "white" colleagues and go for the Jews. We may appear "white" to some, but we are different and can't be lumped into a group of perceived white supremacists"

Union

"My last name is overtly Jewish. I am deeply concerned that, as a teacher, if I'm in need of assistance from my union, I will not be given the same treatment than if I had a different last name, ESPECIALLY if it concerns antisemitism. Even more, the unfounded and derogatory PUBLIC tweets and disinformation that have been liked, retweeted and shared by some union reps is a clear reflection of their personal beliefs, and nowhere do these tweets fall in line with their profession for protecting and enforcing LABOUR RIGHTS. Denying the rape of Israeli women is in no way shape or form related to their job."

Union

"What really troubles and frightens me about execs in the union, as well as the VP and P, is how they make blatantly anti-Jewish statements that would be the end of their careers if their accusations were against another group of people. It would simply not be tolerated. They are showing us that Jewish teachers don't count. They are well on their way in their intention to make the word "Zionist" as reprehensible as possible."

Antisemitism in the profession

"Colleagues are silent. They condemn Israel for defending themselves against Hamas, a known terrorist organization. They post pro-Hamas propaganda. They post false stories that victimize Hamas and claim a genocide. They use vocabulary that they do not understand but will justify it to anyone who will listen because they sympathize with Hamas who they have referred to as 'Freedom Fighters. These same colleagues, teachers, have not condemned Hamas and the massacre and rape of innocent civilians. The only reason that I can think of is because they are Jews. Not only do colleagues post this propaganda that is very clearly anti-Zionist, but my own union representatives. I certainly wouldn't ask them for support if ever I needed it. They have made their stance against Zionists very clear. The board has done nothing to protect Jewish staff and students. Antisemitic incidents are not reported to parents. It feels like they are trying to cover up the extent to which this exists. Swastikas have been drawn on Jewish students' desks and in the bathrooms. I don't just feel unsafe as a Jewish teacher, I feel unsafe to be a Jew."

Fear of identifying as Jew/ Student hate

"I am afraid as a Jewish teacher to identify as a Jew in my school. Afraid of responses and reactions from students, staff and parents. I don't feel protected or safe. About 6 years ago, I was in an LTO and proudly Jewish. My students knew that I was Jewish. One day a student said in front of the entire class that "Germany should have won the war".

Politics in the class

"When teachers wear Keffiyehs at my school I feel vulnerable because I feel they are wearing it as a political statement. After the events of October 7th, it's triggering."

Systemic hatred against Jewish teachers

"I have experienced consistent, aggressive systemic antisemitism from the education union for whom I work. They question me when I take off Jewish holidays, they refuse to learn about antisemitism and they purposely question my work to a level that would be seen by bullying if they behaved the same way to someone who is not Jewish. I have evidence of all of this in writing. I have approached 3 law firms, but nobody will take my case because I work for a union. I am scared and I feel powerless."

Reluctance to recognized antisemitism

"What disturbs me as a Jewish educator is the future for our students and our country. When overt and subtle acts of antisemitism are not rebuked and unequivocally denounced, it gives license to hate and erodes civil society. There exists a lack of knowledge, and more dangerously, unwillingness to understand the roots of antisemitic tropes, and how they manifest. There is resistance and refusal by school boards and educators to recognize antisemitism as real and hurtful. This has left me and my Jewish colleagues both shaken and silenced in our profession, for no reason other than that we are Jews."

Politics in the classroom

"As a Jewish teacher in a public school board I am fearful of the future. I am afraid that the equity work that the school board has been working towards has left a gaping hole for antisemitism and is leaving students and staff feeling isolated, ignored and silenced. I would love to see us go back to teaching academic materials and love of all humanity where we can empower our students to reach their greatest potential. Instead we as teachers are constantly on alert about colleagues and students bringing politics into the classroom with a biased one sided narrative that demonizes and harms Jews."