

APPENDIX A:

Affirming Jewish Identities & Addressing Antisemitism

INTRODUCTION

Hate and racism are longstanding societal issues that impact not only schools, classrooms, and departments in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) but also all institutions and communities across Canada. This is why it is critical that the TDSB continue to improve its efforts against all forms of racism and discrimination. The TDSB expects that all schools and workspaces be respectful and welcoming for all students, staff, and families and that all members of the TDSB prevent and respond to incidents of hate, discrimination, racism and bullying.

It is crucial to address discriminatory incidents based on race, religion, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of an individual's identity (i.e., all human rights code-protected grounds). Such incidents negatively impact students' achievement, mental health, staff engagement, and overall performance, underscoring the urgency of a prompt and effective response.

The Toronto District School Board's 2024-28 Multi-year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and Human Rights Policy provide foundational guidance. The MYSP encompasses five strategic directions built on the foundation of Equity and the TDSB's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. The MYSP pillar of Belonging is an underlying principle of the umbrella strategy of the "Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy" (2023).

The aim of the MYSP is for all students to belong, achieve and thrive within classrooms and schools. This requires that actions begin at the place of Belonging and this is why the MYSP sets the direction for students and staff to see themselves represented within their school or work environments.

In March 2022, the *Combatting Hate and Racism – Student Learning Strategy* was introduced as a multifaceted approach to understanding and addressing the impact of reported cases of hate and racism by specifically focusing on educating students.

The Combatting Hate and Racism Student Learning Strategy aims to foster inclusive, safe, and respectful environments in classrooms and schools. It aims to equip students and staff with the skills needed to honour the diverse identities and experiences within their school community and the broader TDSB. The strategy also encourages critical thinking and respectful engagement, especially when opinions differ. It emphasizes taking proactive steps to prevent discrimination, hate and racism in educational spaces.

In March 2023, the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism umbrella strategy was developed. The TDSB's Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy is a TDSB staff-facilitated and community-led initiative that takes an intersectional and systemic approach to developing and implementing comprehensive two-year work and action plans to combat all forms of discrimination, hate and racism, with academic success as its primary focus. The way specific forms of hate, racism and discrimination are addressed requires coherency, community partnership and cross-collaboration within and amongst the diverse community groups impacted. This requires solidarity and a deep understanding that the work of the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy is everyone's responsibility (TDSB, 2023).

The strategy encompasses six pillars whereby community groups, in collaboration with staff, are developing recommendations to support the Board with its actions:

The community recommendations outlined in this document will allow communities to see themselves in the actions. Ongoing collaboration and support from families, communities, and partner organizations, with staff, will be required as the actions identified are operationalized.

CONTEXT: RATIONALE FOR THE STRATEGY

In March 2023, the TDSB expanded its Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy. The Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy is a community-led, TDSB staff-facilitated initiative to establish a comprehensive two-year strategy and action plan tied to specific areas aligned to the Multi-year Strategic Plan (MYSP) 2024-28, Combatting Hate and Racism - Student Learning Strategy. Antisemitism was identified as one of the strategies for inclusion in the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy in response to the data emanating from the Racism, Bias and Hate Portal.

This document was developed through consultation with Jewish community organizations/agencies. The consultations were focused under the umbrella of the following pillars of the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy of the TDSB:

1. Affirmation of Identities
2. Student Learning Strategy
3. Professional Learning
4. School-Community Relationship
5. Employment Equity
6. School Culture and Climate

In June 1999, the Board of Trustees adopted P037, Equity. This policy was revised in April 2018 and includes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism¹. Antisemitism has mutated historically and in the present, depending on the political and social realities of the time. Many harmful stereotypes about Jewish people continue to manifest. Antisemitism is a pervasive form of hate across many societies, serving as a reflection of broader social problems. It exists independent of the size of Jewish communities and manifests as harassment, violence, and discrimination against Jews and those perceived as Jewish, both in real life and online. Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, schools, and cemeteries, frequently face acts of vandalism and violence.

COURSE OF ACTION

Over several months, consultations were held with a full spectrum of Jewish organizations, agencies, and groups representing diverse beliefs, opinions, and political viewpoints. Throughout the consultations, many examples of how antisemitism is currently manifesting in schools and the city were shared. In addition, Jewish-identifying middle and secondary school students were consulted through Jewish Student Associations and affinity spaces to understand better their lived experiences in the Toronto District School Board. Key themes included:

¹ The [Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism](#) was published by the Government of Canada, October 2024.

- Affirmation of Identity
- Classroom instruction
- Bias in classrooms
- Hate graffiti
- Engaging with Jewish agencies and community organizations
- School climate and culture
- Professional learning needs
- Reporting of antisemitic incidents
- Over-reliance on Holocaust Education over contributions and impacts of Jewish Canadians

Key documents were shared in the consultations with community groups, agencies and organizations (Multi-year Strategic Plan 2024-28, Combating Hate and Racism (CHR) - Student Learning Strategy and the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Strategy). Additionally, an overview was provided of the historical work of the Jewish Heritage Committee, a group of volunteer staff who have, over the last ten years, brought a diversity of programs, learning experiences, and resources to support Holocaust Education, contributions of Jews to Canadian society, cross-cultural partnerships and social justice work. The consultations focused predominantly on the Six Areas of Focus for the CHR Strategy. Participants were asked for recommendations, priorities, and concerns to be included in the strategy.

At the end of each consultation, names of other agencies and organizations were solicited to have the broadest representation possible, recognizing the diversity of opinion, beliefs and identification within the Jewish community.

With student groups, questions about belonging, voice, and learning needed for students and staff were the focus. Consultations with students occurred across 20% of TDSB high schools within affinity spaces in each participating school. The conversations occurred with students from schools within seven general regions of the city: Northwest/east, Southwest/east, Central, Central-north and south. In total, four discussions occurred involving 125 students. The conversations were semi-structured and designed to respond to a pre-established set of questions on the following issues and themes:

- Teaching and Learning Opportunities
- Identity and Expression
- Reflections and Personal Impact
- Key Messages and Insights

WHAT WE HEARD

The consultations with the majority of community groups expressed that anti-Zionism has recently re-emerged as a contemporary form of antisemitism; criticism of Israel in schools can sometimes be rooted in antisemitic beliefs, particularly when it involves blaming Jewish individuals collectively for the circumstances in the Middle East or when it is accompanied by antisemitic slogans, images, physical intimidation and comparisons to the Holocaust. Jewish community members, students and staff revealed concerns about the impact on individuals or groups which are often held accountable as proxies for the State of Israel and its policies.

A recurring theme in the consultations was the demonization of Israel, Israelis and Zionists, which has been normalised in many spaces. Students and staff also spoke about social media platforms which exacerbate this issue, providing a breeding ground for harassment and the spread of conspiracy theories typical of older forms of antisemitism, undermining efforts to promote human rights and democratic principles. Participants in the

consultations shared their concerns that the use of Settler-Colonial narratives about the State of Israel and the Jewish people as colonisers leads to significant harm and contributes to the systemic erasure of Jewish history and identity.

Several participants pointed to the statistic that 91% of Jewish people² identify with the State of Israel and/or *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel) as the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people and Israel's right to exist. Participants pointed to the fact that Jews are not a monolith; Jews are a people, a nation, and a cultural group, though commonly defined singularly as a faith group. While some may not practise the faith, they still identify as Jewish. It was stated as important to understand and recognize that Jewish people, as a global community, have intersecting identities including diverse racial identities, political views and religious practices.

Consultations alleged that reported hate crimes rooted in antisemitism were not taken seriously nor addressed. Hate crimes against Jewish people not only harm immediate victims but also disrupt the daily lives and rights of Jewish individuals, creating a climate of fear that hinders the ability to openly express cultural/faith identity or speak freely to express views.

Participants shared their discomfort and concerns about student walkouts and protests related to circumstances in the Middle East on or around TDSB schools and offices. Participants said that they felt that they were being held responsible for Israeli policies. Additionally, they had to walk through protests that promoted the erasure of the State of Israel. It was acknowledged by some participants that it is imperative to uphold the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression while still remaining vigilant against the manifestations of antisemitism that may arise under the guise of political critique.

Although the majority of organizations (i.e., 88%) consulted expressed the above views, some of the voices shared concerns about the complexity of antisemitism, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches that acknowledge diverse perspectives within the Jewish community. They critiqued mainstream Jewish organizations for conflating antisemitism with anti-Israel sentiment, which they feel silences alternative voices. These individuals called for equity in representation and educational practices, urging the inclusion of marginalized narratives and an emphasis on coalition-building to address interconnected oppressions.

In the affinity spaces, students reported a loss of friendships, feeling unsafe, afraid to share their Jewish identity, and that class discussions about the conflict in the Middle East are facilitated in a way that is biased and intimidating. Jewish-identifying students reported feeling excluded from student equity meetings at their schools. Some students who had not previously sought affinity spaces shared that they now felt the need to do so. Some students have reported a stronger connection to their Jewish identity through affinity spaces while being silenced in other school spaces and classrooms. Students also reported an increase in stress and worry and the prevalence of antisemitic statements that go unchecked and dismissed when reported.

Jewish students also carry intersectional identities and have felt excluded from other affinity student associations where their intersectional identities should be represented but are now excluded. This is similar in affinity spaces where they had previously been welcomed as allies. Jewish students have expressed a strong need to form alliances with non-Jewish students and student groups in order to build bridges. Jewish students identify under a broad range of political beliefs and some have reported finding that isolating as well. They feel their Jewish identities are conflated with the current geopolitical conflict, rather than their personal worth as individuals. Many reported hiding their identities, beliefs and opinions for fear of the impact on them should their identity become known.

² <https://cjs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cjs/jewsandisrael2024>

In our consultations, participants shared the following examples and experiences of antisemitism in our system.

- Criticized for wearing a Magen David or Jewish symbols
- Being labelled racist for being a Zionist
- Removal of Israeli flags from a Jewish Heritage Month Display and a refusal to honour Jewish Heritage Month
- Denial of Jewish people's claims of antisemitism
- Refusal to engage in mandated curriculum linked to Jewish identity or the Jewish experience (i.e., Grade 6 Social Studies, Grade 10 Canadian History)
- Holocaust denial, comparisons, or minimizing the Holocaust
- Public criticism of participation in the annual United Jewish Appeal (UJA) walkathon
- Chants which include calls for the death of Jews
- Direction of anti-Zionist speech or conduct toward Jewish or Israeli people
- Use of tropes, stereotypes or conspiracies about Jewish people
- Demanding a person who is perceived to be Jewish or Israeli to state a position on Israel or Zionism
- Jewish students and staff being excluded, shut out of social groups, alienated, labelled online and in-person

Due to the nature of the consultations, further investigation did not ensue; however, there are records of such events reported through the Racism, Bias and Hate Portal. Consultation facilitators advised participants who shared these examples were encouraged to report these incidents through the appropriate channels and procedures (e.g., Operational Procedure 728: Reporting and Responding to Racism and Hate Incidents Involving or Impacting Students in Schools and/or Operational Procedure PR515: Workplace Harassment Prevention and Human Rights).

ACTION ITEMS AND PRIORITIES

The following actions and priorities were consolidated from recommendations made throughout the consultation process.

Affirmation of Identities

Actions:

1. Ensure anti-oppression and equity work includes Jewish voices and experiences, emphasizing the intersectionality of Jewish identities with other forms of discrimination.
2. Develop and recommend resources that highlight Jewish joy, history, contributions, and diversity including Holocaust education.
3. Establish identity-affirming spaces for Jewish students and staff, including Jewish affinity spaces and involvement in broader affinity spaces like GSAs and BSAs. Connect JSAs throughout the system.
4. Build culturally responsive classrooms that include resources reflective of Jewish identities, lived experiences, and diverse contributions.
5. Engage families to ensure they feel valued, welcomed, and supported in schools, fostering a strong sense of belonging.

School Climate & Culture

Actions:

1. Monitor and support schools in investigating, understanding and responding to antisemitic incidents, ensuring transparency, accountability, and appropriate follow-up (e.g., all incidents are entered into the portal, ensuring they are acknowledged and appropriately addressed). Reports of incidents must be entered into the Racism, Bias and Hate Portal.
2. Address the impact of geopolitical protests (e.g., walkouts, flags, symbols) on the school environment to ensure Jewish/Israeli students and staff feel safe and supported. Interrupt claims that all Jewish/Israeli students/staff are colonizers and complicit in a Settler-Colonial narrative. Adhere to protest guidelines.
3. Ensure schools identify caring adults for Jewish students to confide in, building trust and providing a safe space for reporting incidents.
4. Recognize the presence of Jewish organizations and topics as affirming for Jewish students and staff.
5. Jewish-identifying staff should not be solely responsible for teaching and learning, including professional learning, that is related to Jewish content/history.

Employment Equity

Actions:

1. Maintain a Jewish-identifying Equity Coach position and ensure that there is representation of Jewish-identifying staff at middle and senior management levels to support and address antisemitism and other forms of hate.
2. Hiring and promotion practices are anti-oppressive, bias-free, consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code and promote equitable representation of diversity at all levels of the school system. (see Employment Equity Policy (P029).
3. Provide monitoring and support for Jewish-identifying staff, particularly those impacted by antisemitism.
4. Engage unions and professional organizations to support Jewish staff, including staff who believe they are not supported due to their Jewish identities and/or Zionist ideologies.

5. Establish an affinity space for aspiring Jewish leaders, fostering leadership development and career progression.

Student Learning Strategy

Actions:

1. Deliver mandated curriculum related to Jewish identities in grade 6 and grade 10 Social Studies and Canadian/World Studies courses.
2. Develop resources to support curriculum expectations related to Jewish identities, ensuring content extends beyond the Holocaust.
3. Provide access to resources in classrooms and school libraries that are reflective of intersecting Jewish identities.
4. Provide critical literacy education for students, addressing media/social media representations and antisemitic tropes.
5. Provide professional development to train teachers in delivering content related to or about genocide (e.g., Grade 11 Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course) to avoid harmful comparisons.
6. Include learning opportunities that emphasize shared values among diverse identities to foster bridge-building.

Professional Learning

Actions:

1. Provide system-wide professional learning on legal roles, including duty of care, statutory duties, negligence, liability, and human rights.
2. Provide professional learning to all senior team members to recognize and address antisemitic tropes to ensure incidents are understood and appropriately addressed.
3. Equity work must examine the exclusion of Jewish experience from anti-oppression discourses. (“Nothing about us without us” needs to apply to all identities, including Jews.)
4. Situate antisemitism within Human Rights including ethnic origin, place of origin, creed, ancestry and all intersections of these protected grounds.
5. Offer professional learning for grade 6 and 10 teachers on delivering curriculum related to Jewish identities and Holocaust education.
6. Provide professional learning for staff and Trustees to deepen understanding of antisemitism, including modern manifestations such as anti-Zionism, intersectionality, and Jewish identity diversity.

School-Community Relationships

Actions:

1. Partner with diverse Jewish organizations to support Jewish identities and lived experiences, including those addressing Holocaust education and antisemitism.
2. Support the Jewish Heritage Committee initiatives, including International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jewish Heritage Month, and student leadership development.
3. Engage families in partnerships with local Jewish organizations to support identity affirmation and belonging.
4. Work across identities and with agencies, including agencies that have received funding from the Ministry of Education (e.g. Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center and CIJA) and those in partnership with

the TDSB (e.g., No Silence on Race) adhering to Operational Procedure 589: Vetting External Presentations.

5. Provide consistent and transparent responses to incidents of antisemitism to build trust with the Jewish community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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In addition, we consulted with the Office of the Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism.

And finally, we are indebted to the ongoing advocacy of the Jewish Heritage Committee that has been focused on teaching and learning in classrooms to celebrate Jewish heritage and culture in impactful, innovative and inspirational ways - with the fight against antisemitism and all forms of hate, providing the core goal of this work.