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## EDITORIAL

# Schools need guidance to address antisemitism

Amid rising reports of antisemitism, a state commission offers clear guidance for schools.

By [The Editorial Board](#) Updated July 10, 2025, 4:00 a.m.



Danvers community members gathered on Nov. 20, 2021, for a vigil held in response to a spate of antisemitic graffiti at Holten Richmond Middle School in Danvers and allegations of violent racism on the 2019-20 Danvers High hockey team. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

When Acton-Boxborough Superintendent Peter Light started his job in 2018, the district had a problem with antisemitism. A trailer had been spray-painted with antisemitic graffiti in 2018. Jewish students complained of antisemitic harassment, jokes, and slurs that occurred in the classroom while faculty stood idly by.

In [testimony](#) before the [Massachusetts Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism](#) in November, Light said that staff who heard antisemitic comments didn't always know how to respond. "They didn't want to say the wrong thing. They didn't want to make a bad situation worse," he said. Jewish students were left feeling like staff didn't care, Light said.

The district has since held staff trainings on how to intervene immediately, among other initiatives intended to change the culture. But uncertainty among teachers is a problem state Senator John Velis (D-Westfield), who cochairs the special commission, said he has heard about repeatedly.

"Teachers are afraid of [the topic of antisemitism]," Velis told the editorial board. Velis said many teachers told him they "have no idea what to teach in this space," and they worry about getting in trouble, whatever they say.

Dara Kaufman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, said that she works with schools in her region that experience antisemitic incidents and "don't quite know what to do with it." "They haven't had the education they've had on LGBTQ targeting or racism or other types of marginalization," Kaufman said.

The 19-member special commission, led by Velis and state Representative Simon Cataldo (D-Concord), has released [draft recommendations](#) that aim to address this problem by providing more centralized state resources to address antisemitism in K-12 schools. That would be an important step to ensure school committees, administrators, and teachers have the resources they need to appropriately confront

antisemitism.

The recommendations urge the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop model curricula and resources to teach about Jewish history, antisemitism, and Jewish contributions to America. They say the state agency should develop guidelines to foster a bias-free classroom environment and create a mechanism by which someone can report curriculum they consider discriminatory.

The commission also recommends that the state create a centralized system for tracking and publicizing data about bias incidents of all sorts, including antisemitism. When the attorney general provides guidance to districts about complying with Massachusetts' bullying and antidiscrimination laws, or about providing a safe and secure environment to all students regardless of identity, that guidance should explicitly address antisemitism.

There are also recommendations for school districts. The commission says antisemitism should be included in antibias training for faculty, administrators, and school committees, which the commission suggests should be made mandatory. It urges that antisemitism be part of teaching about genocide and about digital literacy, to help young people identify bigoted content and misinformation online. School counselors should be trained to support students targeted by antisemitic harassment. And school officials should be willing to issue clear and forceful statements that antisemitism won't be tolerated when incidents occur.

In these recommendations, the state could play a role in recommending training curricula or offering sample statements that schools could customize, to avoid mishaps stemming from a lack of understanding. For example, Cataldo said it pains him to see school leaders send out information about an antisemitic incident that speaks about bias without mentioning the words Jew or antisemitism.

Of course, schools need to address all kinds of bias and discrimination. But data

indicate that antisemitism has been on the rise since Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel sparked Israel's retaliatory war. According to the Anti-Defamation League, in 2024, there were [438 reported antisemitic incidents](#) in Massachusetts, up from 152 incidents in 2022. That number included [50 antisemitic incidents](#) at non-Jewish K-12 schools. The antisemitism commission suggests the number of incidents is underreported, since many schools don't clearly instruct students and teachers on when to report incidents, and the state doesn't track the data.

In one recent case in the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District, a Jewish student faced repeated bullying, according to [a brief filed](#) with the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights by the Anti-Defamation League, the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, and private attorneys. Students allegedly made Nazi salutes, divided themselves into athletic teams called "Team Auschwitz" and "Team Hamas," and used antisemitic slurs.

There is reason to worry that some teachers will not welcome the commission's recommendations. Leaders of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the state's largest teachers union, in January released a curriculum resource list on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that [focused almost entirely](#) on a pro-Palestinian narrative, with links to material that was [blatantly antisemitic](#), like a replica of a Star of David made of dollar bills. In June, the MTA board of directors [passed a resolution](#) about academic freedom that criticized what it called the "weaponizing" of antisemitism to suppress learning about the Palestinians.

The antisemitism commission has been clear in saying it does not consider criticism of the Israeli government to be antisemitic. But distinguishing when political criticism crosses into antisemitism can be murky, which is why centralized guidance can help.

The commission intends to release additional recommendations, including on higher education. Members told the editorial board they chose to start with K-12 education because of the vulnerability of schoolchildren and because, as Cataldo said, "it speaks

to what's coming down the pike in our future.”

School administrators and state education officials should quickly move to implement the commission's recommendations.

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