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March 4, 2026

The Honorable Tim Walberg
Chairman, Committee on Education and the
Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin Kiley
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member, Committee on Education and
the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Early
Childhood, Elementary and Secondary
Education
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, Subcommittee Chairman Riley, and Subcommittee
Ranking Member Bonamici:

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) is pleased to submit this letter regarding the ongoing investigation of Fairfax County Public Schools' handling of school-based antisemitism. As the leading grassroots Jewish agency immersed in addressing antisemitism within FCPS, the JCRC has a singular perspective on the school district's history on this issue over the last several years. In our assessment, FCPS has taken meaningful steps on several fronts to address its long, troubled track record on this issue. However, much work remains to be done.

The JCRC's K-12 education outreach portfolio

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC), representing over 100 constituent Jewish agencies, organizations and synagogues in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland, is the chief advocate for the organized local Jewish community to elected officials, government agencies, other faith and ethnic communities, and the media. Founded in 1938, the JCRC's mission is to foster a society based on freedom, justice, and democratic pluralism, that allows Jews and all people to live safely and flourish. The agency's work encompasses legislative advocacy, government affairs, Israel education, interfaith/intergroup relations, Holocaust commemoration and education, and school-based outreach, programming, and advocacy.

The JCRC's education outreach and programming [department](#) engages with 10 separate public school districts and dozens of private sectarian and independent schools throughout the greater Washington D.C. region. The department's mission is to combat school-based antisemitism; advocate on behalf of

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Jewish students, families, and employees; and promote safe, hate-free, respectful learning environments for all students. Our multi-faceted strategies to reduce and prevent school-based antisemitism reach all stakeholders in our local school systems, through:

- advocacy to regional superintendents, senior administrators, and school boards
- direct response to antisemitic incidents, including collaborating with the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law to pursue legal remedies when appropriate and necessary
- partnering with school districts to implement improved education on Jewish identity and history, antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Israel
- curriculum monitoring and consultation
- educator training
- creation and implementation of impactful student anti-bias education and empowerment programs, including our highly regarded [Student to Student](#) peer-education initiative

JCRC's extensive engagement with FCPS

When the JCRC first began intensively addressing long-running complaints from Jewish stakeholders about FCPS, our senior staff encountered pervasive ingrained antisemitism and biases towards Jews, and in fact towards all minority faith individuals. Although Fairfax's population had grown dramatically more diverse in recent decades, with, for the first time, a slim majority of Greater Washington DC's Jews residing in Northern Virginia, its school system had not yet caught up to this reality. In everything from school calendars to bias incident response, FCPS's Jewish students, families, and staff often felt disregarded, dismissed and unfairly disadvantaged because of their minority status.

These systemic biases unquestionably resulted in long-term significant harm to Jewish students and employees. However, we believe these shortcomings represented only the beginning of the story of FCPS's approach to antisemitism, not its conclusion. While there have been administrators and educators who were either unable or unwilling to act, there have also been many FCPS professionals of good will who are sincerely troubled by what Jewish students and employees continue to endure, and who have – and continue to --- work collaboratively and successfully to change the status quo.

Historic Challenges

FCPS largely ignored the problem of school-based antisemitism for many years, perpetuating a culture insensitive to the needs, concerns, and rights of Jewish and other minority-faith students. Specifically:

1. Leaders and educators suffered from widespread lack of basic cultural competency regarding Jews, Jewish history, the unique nature of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and Israel.
2. Policies regarding accommodations for religious observance were poorly understood, inconsistently applied, and at times outright ignored by educators and administrators. FCPS staff often seemed to be oblivious to the impact of their actions on Jewish students, whether the issue was mandatory sports and band practices on Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, or the impermissible teaching of deeply religious Christmas carols to K-2 students.

3. Policies and procedures related to incident reporting and student discipline were weak and inconsistently applied.
4. Principals received inadequate support when incidents occurred and were often left to design and implement interventions on their own.
5. In general, the district maintained a defensive, opaque approach to confronting antisemitic incidents when they occurred, with poor communication to stakeholders. Notices about incidents impacting Jews rarely used the terms “antisemitism” or “Jewish,” and it often took days to receive even basic responses from administrators.

When the JCRC led an interfaith coalition to press for the adoption of an equitable FCPS calendar with school closures on days coinciding with minority-faith observances, we faced widespread ignorance among staff and school Board members about Jews, Judaism and antisemitism; unfortunately, at times we were met with barely camouflaged hostility and prejudice. After a difficult, public campaign, the Fairfax County School Board in February 2022 finally adopted an equitable calendar, which was an important first step in improving conditions for Jewish students and employees.

This [major victory](#) unfortunately coincided with an alarming spike in school-based antisemitic incidents nationwide and here in our own community. At that time, top FCPS leaders were ineffective in responding to increasing incidents and in implementing long overdue systemic changes to better protect Jewish students. Problems worsened in the immediate aftermath of Hamas’ horrific attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, with many of these issues continuing to the present day.

Recent and current landscape

The 2024 ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents identified Virginia as #5 nationwide for reported K-12 antisemitic incidents. Today, JCRC continues to respond to a wide range of situations within FCPS that harm Jewish students and teachers, in the classroom, on school premises, and on social media.

- Student walkouts – After 10/7, students at many Fairfax schools organized walkouts to support Palestinians. Unfortunately, some walkouts featured rhetoric, signage, and behavior that referenced well-known antisemitic tropes, demonized Israelis, Zionists, and Jews, and violated school policies prohibiting marches or rallies in school hallways. Many Jewish students and faculty members reported being disturbed and frightened when these incidents occurred.
- Culture /International Nights – Unfortunately, educational events intended to foster greater cultural awareness and respect were, at certain schools, disrupted by small groups of students making political statements that disrespected and harmed Jewish and Israeli students, thereby violating the FCPS codes of conduct. Only a few months ago, a Palestinian display at a school International Night featured a map that completely erased the State of Israel. At another school’s event, Jewish students presenting an Israel display were harassed and bullied by schoolmates for the entire length of the program.

- Classroom assignments/curriculum – The JCRC continues to field reports regarding inappropriate classroom instruction that, unwittingly or not, promotes antisemitic tropes. Many of these incidents involve class lessons or homework assignments regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict and/or pro-Israel activism in the United States.
- Impermissible yearbook content --- In 2024, several FCPS schools failed to prevent harmful, biased content from being included in senior yearbooks. In one instance, a student chose the phrase “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” as the caption for their photo. Other yearbooks featured photographs of pro-Palestinian student walkouts that included the same antisemitic imagery and rhetoric that should have been banned from the outset.
- Failure to adequately supervise and mentor student clubs --- In fall 2025, several Muslim Student Association clubs posted videos on unauthorized social media accounts using school names that featured reenactments of kidnappings and death. While the students claimed no ill-intent, the harm to Jewish students, and to the broader Jewish community, was significant.
- Normalized antisemitic harassment - Nazi swastika graffiti continues to regularly appear in FCPS buildings, as it does in other schools in our region. Our sense, based on reports we receive from parents, Jewish educators, and Jewish students themselves, is that verbal harassment and social isolation, particularly related to Israel and Gaza, is routine, and most often goes unaddressed.

Steps taken, progress made

With the arrival of a new Superintendent in July 2022, Dr. Michelle Reid, the JCRC began to see a slow but steady shift in the attitudes and responses of senior administrators to the justified anger and concerns shared by so much of the Fairfax Jewish community.

Soon after arriving, Dr. Reid initiated quarterly meetings with senior JCRC leadership to improve communication, responsiveness, collaboration, and accountability. Those meetings have continued until the present time and include top-level members of Dr. Reid’s management team. In the days and weeks following Hamas’ horrific October 7th attack on Israel, Dr. Reid intentionally extended herself to the Jewish community, meeting with a group of Jewish JCRC student leaders and attending a session with 10/7 survivors that was co-sponsored by the JCRC. She invested significant time and energy to understand the harms Jewish students were experiencing from peers during that terrible time.

Improvements under Dr. Reid’s leadership include:

- FCPS now regularly consults with the JCRC on communications to stakeholders when antisemitic incidents occur, to ensure that that they are culturally sensitive and transparent
- In March 2023, the Superintendent participated in a JCRC town hall attended by over 200 students, parents and community members

- In advance of the one-year anniversary of 10/7, FCPS' Central Office provided comprehensive support resources to principals, to aid them in ensuring safe spaces for students
- JCRC professionals now consult regularly with FCPS Social Studies and English coordinators on curriculum development and review, training, and program offerings
- A good number of principals and assistant principals now regularly proactively reach out to JCRC staff for advice on a variety of issues, including classroom instruction on sensitive topics, avoiding conflicts on International/Culture Night events, evaluating and responding to antisemitic incidents, and accessing resources and best practices
- Jewish teachers recently launched an FCPS-sanctioned and supported affinity group.

Critically, only last month, the JCRC presented, at FCPS' request, a mandatory training for over 730 FCPS middle and high school social studies teachers, on "Understanding Jewish Identity and Antisemitism."

This training was the outgrowth of years of relationship and trust-building between JCRC professionals and FCPS administrators, and months of collaboration and planning. It is of particular importance given that many of the classroom-based problems the JCRC deals with occur in social studies classes. Preliminary feedback survey results indicate that the training was very well-received, and that many teachers felt it was a long overdue response to the consistent antisemitic attitudes and behaviors they observe among their students.

The work ahead

Much work remains to be done to address and prevent antisemitism within FCPS.

- All FCPS educators and mental health personnel must receive mandated training on understanding Jewish identity, antisemitism and anti-Zionism.
- The disciplinary process must be more transparent – thought must be given to balancing privacy requirements with the need for parents and other stakeholders to feel confident that meaningful actions are taken to respond to incidents and that perpetrators actually receive consequences.
- FCPS must institute a formal tracking system for bias-related incidents, and the Division must be transparent about the numbers and types of incidents that occur.
- As a general matter, there must be greater accountability and transparency throughout FCPS, especially in communications with parents.

- Codes of conduct related to student club activities and social media usage must be strengthened, with clear expectations set for club faculty advisers and students.
- There must be clear and consistent messaging from school district leaders on a zero-tolerance policy for antisemitism wherever and however it manifests, including when it presents as anti-Zionism. To be clear, criticism of the Israeli government is not antisemitic. Chants and other types of harassment that reference the destruction of Israel, the purging of Jews from the area of land that is Israel, and the delegitimization of the Jewish state, ARE antisemitic, and must not be allowed. Jewish students must be able to attend school without feeling terrified and threatened.

Conclusion

We greatly appreciate the House Committee on Education and the Workforce’s commitment to shining a light on the societal scourge of school-based antisemitism, which impacts families across our nation each day. We would welcome the opportunity to brief your staff on our efforts not only within FCPS, but in other counties across Northern Virginia that continue to experience similar, and even more serious, struggles in confronting antisemitism in their schools.

Sincerely,

Guila Franklin Siegel
Chief Operating Officer

Sara Winkelman
Director, Education Programs and Services

cc: Dr. Michelle Reid, Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools