

September 17, 2024

Dear Superintendents and School Administrators,

We write in anticipation of the one-year anniversary of Hamas's brutal attack on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza. The rapes, murders and kidnappings on October 7th constituted the worst slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, and Gaza's civilian population has been devastated. At this time, Hamas and other terrorist groups continue to hold nearly one hundred hostages, seven of them American. The trauma for Jewish, Israeli, Muslim and Palestinian students is ongoing.

We are hearing from Jewish community leaders, parents, teachers and students that they are afraid of what this anniversary holds for them, given the tremendous amount of antisemitism and anti-Zionism they have confronted in schools since last October.

We encourage you to prepare in advance for this tragic milestone so that the Jewish parents' and teachers' worst fears are not realized. With that in mind we are pleased to provide you with resources for navigating this difficult moment. As always, I am here to help to review communications or meet with you to help think through these difficult issues.

1. Awareness

Meet with your Jewish student groups and Muslim/Arab student groups beforehand to understand their needs and fears, to offer support, and set guidelines for any activities they may be planning in reference to October 7th.

Many Jewish students have faced increasingly hostile rhetoric online and in their schools because of their real or perceived connection to Israel and Zionism. As [American Jewish Committee](#) notes in its guidance for K-12 Administrators, "some of that rhetoric has included deeply problematic messaging about 10/7 that denies or minimizes the 10/7 attacks or dehumanizes Israeli victims of 10/7 (e.g., "no innocent Israelis"; tearing down or vandalism of hostage posters; denial of sexual assault committed against Israelis). It has also included attempts to reframe the violence and terror of 10/7 as justified resistance, decolonization, or liberation. Language that minimizes or denies the impact of 10/7, vilifies Israel and Zionism, or engages in victim-blaming for the atrocities committed on 10/7 will resonate painfully for many Jewish students, especially when it appears in the school spaces that are so central to their lives."

2. Action

Be prepared for activities or programs that may take place at your school, and anticipate potential needs of your Jewish students and faculty:

- Communicate to the appropriate school personnel, such as divisional principals, grade deans, and/or school mental health professionals that Jewish students and faculty may need extra support on or around October 7th. Plan ahead so that staff is ready to support the school's Jewish community members that day.
- Provide Jewish students and faculty time and space to reflect and commemorate the October 7th attacks, such as a "drop-in" space during lunch or affinity group time.
- Ensure that no important or required school events (such as Back to School Night, college guidance programs, etc.) are scheduled for the night of October 7th, when many Jewish community members will be attending a community wide [memorial](#) program at the Anthem in DC.
- Be aware that student walkouts or protests against Israel on October 7th will be extremely hurtful, frightening, and upsetting to many of your Jewish students, faculty and community members. Such activity should be avoided at all costs on October 7th.
- Recognize that Jewish student, teacher or parent affinity groups may want to create their own programming to memorialize October 7th. If your school has such a group, be prepared to support those programs by offering school space after school hours and by ensuring that the appropriate school administrator(s) is/are present and keeping potential security concerns in mind.

3. Messaging to Your School Community

Schools vary in how and when they respond to calendar milestones. If your school chooses to publicly acknowledge October 7th in some way, whether through principals' weekly emails or daily announcements, please remember to do so sensitively and thoughtfully.

Here is some sample language:

As we approach the upcoming one-year anniversary on 10/7 of Hamas's attack on Israel, we want to take a moment to remember the horrors that took place that day and the beginning of the Israel Hamas war in Gaza that has resulted in tremendous loss of life. Our hearts go out to those of you in our school community who were and continue to be impacted by this. We also continue to hope for the release of hostages still in Gaza and peace for all in the region.

Today, October 7 marks the first anniversary of the brutal attack in Israel by Hamas, a terrorist group. This tragedy resulted in the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. Hostages from a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds, hailing from the United States and 17 other countries, were kidnapped. This attack initiated the Israel-Hamas War causing many deaths and suffering for the people living in Gaza and Israel. On this day, we think about all in our school community and nation

affected by these sad events. We hope for a timely return of all remaining hostages and peace throughout the region.

4. Walkout Guidelines

We know this fall there might be renewed student walkouts. Here is a reminder of best practices:

- a. Set clear expectations for student conduct and what is acceptable and what is not (ie: what can they have on signs – not using “From the River to the Sea.... Or Zionists are Nazis”
- b. Review and, if appropriate, clarify time, place, and manner regulations applicable to protest activity, to ensure that such activity does not disrupt normal school operations.
- c. Share guidelines with student groups planning protest activity can ensure their behavior and actions align with the school system’s rules
- d. Send a letter home to families explaining protocols and how all students will be protected.

5. Respectful Civic Discourse

Utilize any activities related to Israel or Palestine as an opportunity to talk about our responsibility to maintain an atmosphere conducive to civil discourse, mutual empathy and a respectful exchange of ideas.

- a. Understand the role that Media plays in misinformation and polarization. This [Media Literacy Guide](#) includes resources for fact-checking, for responding to misinformation and disinformation, and for protecting our infrastructures of democracy through news literacy.
- b. Check out this teen friendly “Think before you post” [SNS GUIDE TO AVOIDING HATE SPEECH](#) that is antisemitic or Islamophobic.

6. Additional Resources

Education is key to decreasing bias. Ensure education opportunities for both Staff and Students. Here are just a few select resources:

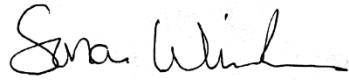
- a. Institute for Curriculum Services: [Support for Classroom Instruction on the Hamas-Israel War](#)
- b. Facing History and Ourselves: [Confronting Antisemitism: Brave Classrooms](#)
- c. Council on Foreign Relations: [What is Hamas](#)
- d. Unpacked for Educators: [Teaching through Israeli Music post 10/7](#)
- e. [6 Tips for Supporting Jewish Students in the Classroom | ADL](#)
- f. [Conversations that Matter: Understanding and Discussing Antisemitism with Young People | ADL](#)

Please share any preparations or guidelines with your Jewish students, teachers and families so they can feel seen and enable students to come to school in a safe environment the week of 10/7.



Again, feel free to reach out to meet.

All my best,



Sara Winkelman
Director, Education Programs & Services