

## 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. It's 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 [www.JEFA.ca](http://www.JEFA.ca).

### 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 classrooms<sup>1</sup>. These materials included links to and resources from designated terror organizations. It is unknown how many children were exposed to these terrorist propaganda 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](http://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

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cija.ca/tdsb\\_reinstates\\_staff\\_member\\_who\\_distributed\\_terrorist\\_materials](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."*