

GUIDANCE FOR K-12 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS FOLLOWING THE NAIS PoCC CONFERENCE

The Center for Education Advocacy (CEA) at American Jewish Committee (AJC) deeply values our partnership with independent school leaders. Together, we share a commitment to fostering educational environments that promote critical thinking and inclusivity. Our collaboration ensures that these spaces remain welcoming to all identities, including Jewish students, faculty, and families, while firmly rejecting all forms of antisemitism. We appreciate the trust you place in us and are dedicated to supporting your schools as a thoughtful and responsive partner. We hope this guidance will assist you in intentionally addressing the impact of what happened at PoCC in your school community.

Background

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) People of Color Conference (PoCC) in Denver, held from December 4-7, 2024, aimed to promote equity and inclusion. Unfortunately, the event included biased and hateful anti-Zionist rhetoric, which created a hostile environment for Jewish students and faculty in attendance, contrary to the conference's mission and intent. Speakers, including the keynote speaker, accused Israel of genocide, labeled its establishment as "racist," and minimized the impact of the October 7, 2023 Hamas terrorist attack, often receiving hearty applause from the audience.

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism often overlap. The vast majority of Jews support the Jewish people's right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland of Israel. Demonizing Zionism frequently results in the exclusion and marginalization of Jewish individuals, as evidenced by one student's testimony: *"We felt so unsafe that we tucked our Magen Davids (Jewish stars) inside our shirts as others glared and whispered."*

In the days following the conference, CEA connected personally with NAIS senior leadership and was grateful to have had a productive dialogue. AJC, along with other major Jewish organizations, sent [this letter](#) to NAIS expressing deep concern, and NAIS responded with [this letter](#), which unequivocally and firmly condemns what happened at the conference, takes responsibility, and commits to doing the work to ensure that "future NAIS events will be places where difficult topics and conversations are approached with sensitivity and care for all."

Guidance for Action: Addressing and Learning from this Incident

To address the impact of this experience and advance inclusivity, AJC's Center for Education Advocacy recommends the following steps:

1. Acknowledge and Engage

- **Communicate Transparently and with Sensitivity:** Inform your faculty about what occurred at PoCC and explain [why it was problematic](#), particularly for Jewish students and faculty who may feel hurt or alienated.
 - Keep in mind that school communications or assemblies with enthusiastic reports about the experience of your school's delegation to PoCC with no acknowledgment of the hurt and damage caused to Jewish attendees may cause harm to Jewish members of your school community. Communicate with nuance, acknowledging the positive experiences of attendees and also the problematic aspects of the conference.
- **Debrief Delegates:** Convene discussions with faculty and students who attended PoCC to process their experiences and ensure attendees understand its impact on Jewish participants.
- **Engage Jewish Affinity Groups:** Proactively reach out to Jewish students, parents, and faculty to listen, address concerns, and reaffirm their full belonging in the school community.

2. Enhance Faculty Training and DEI Frameworks

- **Provide Professional Development:** Equip educators with the skills to recognize antisemitism, including when anti-Zionism crosses the line into antisemitism, understand Jewish identity, and navigate nuanced conversations about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Contact us to schedule a faculty workshop that addresses these topics tailored for your school community.
- **Integrate Jewish Identity into DEI:** Ensure Jews and Jewish experiences are explicitly included in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives.
- **Access Educational Resources:** Collaborate with organizations like AJC to incorporate comprehensive materials on Jewish culture, history, and diversity into your curriculum and programming.

3. Address the Broader Climate

- **Acknowledge Rising Challenges:** Recognize the heightened hostility and emotional toll Jewish students may face due to their connection to Israel and Zionist identity.
- **Confront Harmful Rhetoric:** Take a firm stance against narratives that dehumanize Israelis, deny historical realities such as the October 7 attacks, or blame American Jews for the actions of the Israeli government.
- **Support Jewish Students and Faculty:** Utilize [guides, calendars, and other materials](#) to educate your community about Jewish culture, holidays, and history and to reinforce policies that ensure Jewish community members feel included and protected.

Partnering with CEA for Long-Term Impact

Partnering with AJC's Center for Education Advocacy gives schools access to education and programming that addresses Jewish history, antisemitism, and the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with balance and respect. Dedicated to fostering inclusive learning environments, CEA collaborates with schools to create spaces rooted in democratic values, civic education, and resilience against antisemitism. Our team of experts provides tailored resources and workshops for administrators, faculty, students, and parents, offering comprehensive support to promote understanding and inclusion. Our offerings include:

- **Training for Educators:** [Equip your staff with tools](#) such as sessions on antisemitism, Jewish identity, and Israel to promote informed and respectful discussions.
- **Equip stakeholders with [guides detailing proactive strategies, concrete steps, and sound policies](#)** that raise awareness and support inclusion so Jewish students can thrive safely.
- **Enhancing DEI Initiatives:** Tools and strategies to ensure Jewish identity awareness and address the complex ways discrimination affects Jewish students.
- **Facilitating Nuanced Conversations:** Supporting schools in developing programming that engages with the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Jewish history, ensuring discussions are balanced, respectful, and grounded in critical thinking.

Resources to Support Your Efforts

To assist in these endeavors, CEA offers a variety of resources, including:

- [5 Facts About the Jewish People's Ancestral Connection to the Land of Israel](#)
- [The ABCs of Jewish Inclusion](#)
- [Confronting Antisemitism in Our Schools: An Action Plan for Heads of Independent Schools](#)
- ["Cultural Night" Program Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)

Closing: A Shared Commitment to Educational Excellence

AJC's Center for Education Advocacy is your partner in fostering a deeper understanding of the Jewish people, combating antisemitism, and helping build a school environment resilient against all forms of hate. Our team of experienced and passionate educators are driven by a deep commitment to working hand-in-hand with schools to help them foster environments that prioritize critical thinking, inclusion, and mutual respect—ensuring students can grow into thoughtful, engaged members of society. As a global leader in bridge-building advocacy for 118 years, AJC stands ready to support your school's mission with integrity and expertise.

We're here to help. [Contact us!](#)