



ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA

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VIA EMAIL (OCR.Philadelphia@ed.gov)

Beth Gellman-Beer, Regional Director
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
The Wanamaker Building
100 Penn Square East, Suite 515
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3323

Dear Ms. Gellman-Beer:

The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA)¹ files this complaint under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act against Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), the largest public school district in Maryland, serving a population of more than 160,000 students. As the complaint describes in detail, Jewish students in MCPS have been subjected to years of antisemitic harassment and intimidation, which district officials have known about but have failed to effectively address, in violation of Title VI.

On February 26, 2024, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reportedly opened an investigation into the antisemitism in MCPS, based on a complaint that relied solely on an opinion piece written by a Jewish parent and a Jewish teacher in MCPS. We respectfully urge OCR to open another investigation into the antisemitism plaguing MCPS, based on the ZOA's detailed complaint, which is grounded in reports to us from many members of the MCPS community. We understand that opening another investigation is not unusual. In a letter to the ZOA dated February 22, 2024, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Catherine Lhamon confirmed that "it is not uncommon for OCR to have multiple ongoing investigations of the same institution in a particular area of its jurisdiction."

¹ Founded in 1897, the ZOA is the oldest pro-Israel organization in the U.S. Today, the ZOA is the leading major American Jewish organization fighting for the safety and security of Israel and for the rights and interests of the Jewish people. The ZOA pioneered the use of Title VI of the Civil Rights to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment and intimidation at federally funded schools. The ZOA also led the successful six-year battle to ensure that Title VI would be enforced to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment and discrimination. We have helped Jewish students enforce this right at schools across the U.S.

MCPS's Long History of Failing to Effectively Address Antisemitic Name-Calling, Swastikas, Heil Hitler Salutes, and Other Expressions of Jew-Hatred

As district officials know, antisemitism is and has been a serious and longstanding problem in MCPS. Even before the Hamas massacre in Israel on October 7, 2023, statistics in MCPS showed that even though Jews comprise only approximately 10% of the Montgomery County population, [61% of all hate/bias incidents in MCPS](#) targeted the Jewish community.

Here is just one example. A Jewish parent heartbreakingly described to us the antisemitic harassment and intimidation that her son – designated herein as “K” – repeatedly endured in both middle school and high school in MCPS. When K attended Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School (which has been renamed Odessa Shannon Middle School), he wore a kippah and was thus observably Jewish. He paid a painful price for expressing his Jewish identity.

Unprovoked, another middle school student called K “a Jewish f—k.” Distraught, K reported the antisemitic comment to his parents who reported it to the then-principal. The principal explained that the school was about to close due to the Covid pandemic, but assured K’s mother that the school would investigate the incident and impose consequences on the perpetrator. School officials never confirmed with K’s parents that consequences were ultimately imposed or that any other remedial steps were taken. The school did not alert the community to the incident, or publicly condemn the antisemitism, or provide any support to K.

When K became a student at John F. Kennedy High School, he wore his kippah and also tzitzit, which are fringes that are attached to a tallit – the prayer shawl that some observant Jews wear throughout the day, often under a shirt. (Tzitzit serve as a physical reminder of G-d and G-d’s commandments.) Again, K became a target simply because he was openly and proudly Jewish.

In ninth grade, students made antisemitic comments to K in the hallways and in his classes, including “Jew boy” and “Hey, Jew.” K’s mother reported the antisemitic conduct to the principal, who took no action. School officials did not alert the community, did not condemn the conduct, imposed no consequences on K’s bullies, and took no steps to ensure K’s sense of safety and belonging.

In tenth grade, K endured Heil Hitler salutes in the hallway. Swastikas were drawn on the walls of the school. He was also subjected to antisemitic comments such as “dirty Jew,” “Jew boy” and “Jewish f—k.” Again, K’s mother reported the harassment that her son was enduring, but the school took no action in response, failing even to alert the community that these hateful antisemitic incidents had occurred and to send the message to students, families and staff that antisemitic bigotry would not be tolerated.

Once, during a school assembly in the gym, during the singing of the American national anthem, a student turned to K and gave him the Heil Hitler salute. After K’s mother alerted the principal, the principal called both students into his office. But no consequences were imposed on the perpetrator. Instead, the principal justified the perpetrator’s conduct, claiming that the

perpetrator did not know what he was doing when he singled out a Jewish student and gave him the Nazi salute.

K was a member of the baseball team at Kennedy High School and endured antisemitic harassment and intimidation there, too. A teammate called him a “Jewish f—k.” The perpetrator was disciplined and issued an apology. But the coach’s response to the incident was unhelpful and misguided: Instead of using this antisemitic incident as a teaching opportunity, the coach made light of it, telling the perpetrator that if he had a problem in the future, he should direct his comments to the coach instead and call the coach “a Scottish f—k.” The coach’s response demonstrated his absolute ignorance about how to effectively respond to antisemitism. It also demonstrated MCPS’s failure to educate the coach and other staff about how to handle antisemitic incidents appropriately and constructively when they occur. Feeling unwelcome and unsafe, K left the baseball team before the end of the season.

K is not the only Jewish student who has been subjected to antisemitic name-calling and Heil Hitler salutes. Other students have also endured derogatory comments like “Jew” and “Jew-boy.”

Swastikas in MCPS are commonplace. In January 2023, swastikas were discovered drawn on [student desks at three separate schools](#) within MCPS in one week. In March 2023, [Nazi words or symbols were found drawn in five MCPS schools](#). In March 2024, several student bathrooms were defaced with [swastikas at Richard Montgomery High School](#). This was not this high school’s first brush with antisemitic vandalism; a swastika was [spray painted](#) in bright orange on the side of the school in 2019. On February 5, 2024, the Washington Post [reported](#) that since January 2024 – a period of one month – officials had found swastikas on desks at MCPS’s Tilden Middle School, Magruder High School, Silver Creek Middle School, Gaithersburg High School, and Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

In December 2022, the entrance sign at Walt Whitman High School was vandalized with the words, “[Jews Not Welcome](#).” This occurred just days after a [student-led schoolwide lesson on antisemitism](#). One day after the sign’s defacement, several staff members at Walt Whitman received [antisemitic email messages](#).

Also in December 2022, within days of the antisemitic graffiti on the school’s entrance sign, two students on Walt Whitman’s debate team allegedly made antisemitic comments, including about their Jewish teammates, during an off-campus team trip. The two students [allegedly joked about using challah to lure Jewish people](#) – including specific debate team members – to the Andaman Islands and burn them at the stake. [Reportedly](#), the two students referred to burning Jewish people while playing the music of Kanye West (a notorious antisemite) and “mosque music.”

Instead of recognizing that the antisemitism had now frighteningly escalated to death threats made against Jewish students and that it was imperative to disclose this incident immediately and condemn the perpetrators forcefully, school administrators tried to hush it up. They [reportedly](#) directed debate team members not to speak about the incident with their peers.

And they did not notify the community about the incident until almost a month after it was reported – and after the media had already disclosed it.

While the school punished the two student perpetrators, the punishment was lenient, given that the two students had made violent threats to Jews and to specific Jewish teammates.² Furthermore, the punishment – a one-month suspension from the debate team and attendance at three “restorative learning” sessions – showed little regard for the safety and well-being of the Jewish students on the team.³ As one student said, “By allowing them [the perpetrators] back on the team, the people who made this decision are forcing Jewish students to either collaborate with and even be in the same hotel room with those students, or quit the team, essentially.”

Antisemitism has even infected MCPS’s elementary schools. A Jewish parent informed us about what her child endured as a second grader at Rock Creek Forest Elementary School. While the Jewish child was sitting at her lunch table, the girl seated next to her said, “My family hates Jews and I hate Jews, too.” The lunch teacher admonished the perpetrator and reminded her of the importance of being kind. In addition, the principal spoke with the perpetrator’s parents who expressed surprise about how their child could have expressed hateful feelings toward Jews. The school did not alert the community to the antisemitic conduct and did not make it clear to the community that such conduct would not be tolerated.

At a school board meeting on May 10, 2023, a Jewish sixth grader in MCPS courageously addressed the board about what she called the “frightening increase in antisemitic incidences” in the district and she gave some examples from her school. Someone at school told her a “joke” – that she and her Jewish friend “should be put in a concentration camp.” Another Jewish friend was asked “where his horns were,” and yet another Jewish friend found a swastika drawn on her notebook. This student also described finding swastikas on multiple desks at her middle school. At her sibling’s elementary school, two hateful incidents occurred within days of each other. The student lamented MCPS’s inadequate response to such a serious problem and recommended several steps for MCPS to take, including disciplining student perpetrators and educating students about contemporary antisemitism and how to recognize it.

Other than a perfunctory thank you to this brave Jewish student, not a single board member responded to the horrors that she described, even to express dismay and empathy for what she and other Jewish students were enduring and to assure her that MCPS would take the necessary steps to remedy the problems.

² Walt Whitman’s principal said that the school did not find evidence that students were named as targets as was alleged.

³ The two student perpetrators who participated in the restorative justice process reportedly did not appropriately apologize or acknowledge their actions. The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) requested that the school stop the restorative justice process because it was causing more harm to students, not helping.

MCPS's Abysmal Response to Antisemitic Harassment and Intimidation Has Continued, Even After the Worst Massacre of the Jewish People Since the Holocaust

On October 7, 2023, the terrorist group Hamas slaughtered, mutilated, burned alive, and raped over 1,200 children, women and men in Israel, and kidnapped hundreds of others – including babies and the elderly – and took them as hostages to Gaza where over 130 individuals still remain, enduring unimaginable neglect, abuse and torture. Hamas' massacre was the most horrific mass slaughter of the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

Many Jewish students and their families in MCPS were traumatized by these events and continue to be. Many are feeling anxious and afraid, particularly in light of growing antisemitism around the world, in the U.S. and in their own Montgomery County. But MCPS has failed to give them the support and empathy they expected and deserved. Indeed, MCPS has continued not only to tolerate antisemitism, but also to indulge and legitimize it, as described below.

MCPS's Weak Response to Hamas' Massacre of Jews

After Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, MCPS's first message to the community, on October 8, 2023, was simply a [reminder](#) that schools would be closed the following day for "staff professional day." In a district with a large Jewish population and where antisemitism was already a serious problem, MCPS did not condemn – or even acknowledge – that innocent Jewish men, women and children, including Americans, were just murdered at a music festival and in their homes and communities and taken hostage by a terrorist group openly committed to killing all Jews.

On October 10, 2023, MCPS issued a [statement](#) to the community about Gaza and Israel, expressing that "[o]ur heartfelt thoughts are with our students and their families, who may be experiencing the impact of the deeply disturbing and tragic violence in Israel and Gaza in a variety of ways." The statement affirmed that "[o]ur schools must be welcoming, safe, and secure places for all students" and it provided resources for families.

But MCPS failed to condemn the massacre and failed to educate the community about the problem of antisemitism which was already soaring in the U.S. and deeply problematic in MCPS. The statement did not even mention antisemitism or contain a single reference to Jews.⁴

Some but not all principals of schools in MCPS also issued statements to their respective school communities. Reportedly, MCPS provided the text for principals to use, from which they were directed not to deviate.⁵ The principals' statements inexplicably referred to "natural disaster" that "can elicit feelings of anxiety and uncertainty" – even though the Hamas massacre

⁴ MCPS's board of education [did not issue](#) any statement about the Hamas massacre. The student member of the board made it clear that he did not want to be included in any message related to the massacre and the board's chief of staff advised that no message be issued.

⁵ One parent informed us that a principal who had gone "off script" and acknowledged Hamas' attack as terrorism "got blowback from the county."

plainly was no natural disaster, but rather a deliberate and premeditated breach of Israel’s border to kill Jews and destroy Israel.⁶

When MCPS was criticized for its appalling response to Hamas’ terrorism, the then-superintendent, Dr. Monifa B. McKnight,⁷ issued another statement on October 11, 2023. It was not much better. While the statement noted “the terrorist attacks on innocent civilians in Israel,” it did not condemn the attacks. Once again, the statement made no mention of Jews or antisemitism. Instead, it focused on encouraging the community to be vigilant about distressing social media content that students might be viewing and sharing.

MCPS’s weak response to the massacre and hostage-taking of Jews – including nearly 40 Americans – is a stark contrast to the district’s response to violence committed against other racial and ethnic groups. On May 30, 2020, MCPS issued a [statement](#) forcefully condemning the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and calling for a future without racial injustice. In the statement, MCPS committed to working with “the Black and Brown Coalition and other allies to ensure that our policies, practices and procedures are equitable.” MCPS even commissioned a two-year study which resulted in an “[Antiracist System Action Plan](#),” issued in April 2023. The action plan made no mention of Jews or anti-Jewish racism and did not address how MPCS intended to remedy the longstanding antisemitism in the district.

MCPS also responded forcefully after a shooting spree on March 16, 2021, in Atlanta, Georgia, in which six of the eight people killed were of Asian descent. The superintendent and school board president issued a [statement](#) the very next day. Even though, as MCPS acknowledged, it was unclear whether the killer was motivated by hatred of Asians, MCPS appropriately understood that this horrific incident was an opportunity to condemn rising hate crimes against Asian Americans – behavior that MCPS described as “abhorrent and unacceptable.” MCPS encouraged anyone who experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment to come forward and report it. Also, MCPS posted a video about “the importance of ally building and how we can work together to create safe spaces for Asian-American students” and encouraged everyone to watch it.

MCPS has never taken similar steps when Jews were the targets, even after Jewish men, women and children – including Americans – were slaughtered and taken hostage on October 7, 2023.

MCPS’s Inadequate Response to School Staff Who Have Promoted Jew- and Israel-Hatred

MCPS’s indifference to antisemitism is reflected in its inadequate response to the antisemitism that several staff members openly and publicly expressed after the Hamas

⁶ A Jewish teacher at Montgomery Blair High School in MCPS wisely suggested to the principal and the equity coordinator that the school issue a statement advising the community that no one should use the Hamas massacre or Israel’s incursion in Gaza as a “pretext” for either additional antisemitic attacks or violence against Muslim or Arab-American members of the community. The teacher told us that his suggestion “fell on deaf ears.”

⁷ Dr. McKnight [resigned](#) from her position as superintendent in a “mutually agreed separation” on February 2, 2024, for reasons unrelated to the issues raised in this complaint. On February 6, 2024, the Montgomery County Board of Education appointed Dr. Monique Felder as interim superintendent.

massacre. MCPS placed four such staff members on administrative leave, but then reinstated all of them just weeks later, sending the message to the community that antisemitism would be tolerated in the district, regardless of how hurtful and harmful the impact on Jewish students and their families.

MCPS Places Sabrina Khan-Williams on Administrative Leave But Then Reinstates Her

Sabrina Khan-Williams was a world studies teacher and a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team leader at Tilden Middle School. In November 2023, her horrific antisemitic messages posted on social media came to light, including but not limited to the following:

- Khan-Williams publicly denied the facts about the Hamas massacre and falsely accused Israel of deliberately attacking hospitals in Gaza, posting: “Debunked!! No music festival attack. Babies were not burned. Women were not violated. Hospitals were attacked on purpose.”
- Khan-Williams shared a video promoting an outrageous lie that Jews were killing Palestinian Arabs in order to cut out their organs and sell them, posting: “Palestinians are being killed and their organs are being sold. How is real life scarier than movies??”
- Khan-Williams blamed Israel for Hamas’ barbarism, posting: “Hamas did not start this. They were just the perfect vehicle for Zionists to continue its [sic] apartheid.”
- Showing zero tolerance for anyone who did not share her hatred for and condemnation of Israel, Khan-Williams shared a video and posted, “you are not a good human being” if you support Israel’s actions.

It is a poor reflection on Tilden and MCPS that Khan-Williams was hired in the first place as a “diversity, equity and inclusion” teacher. She plainly lacked any knowledge or understanding of how Jews could be made to feel marginalized and even unsafe, because she herself was openly engaging in and promoting the hatred of Jews and Israelis.

MCPS placed Khan-Williams on administrative leave after her social media posts were reported. But when the Tilden Middle School Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) contacted MCPS and repeatedly requested the district’s support for addressing antisemitism at Tilden, [“the MCPS central office has not been responsive,”](#) according to the PTSA.

Tilden’s principal, Sapna Hopkins, was also indifferent to her community’s concerns about Khan-Williams’ antisemitic social media posts. In a message to the community on November 17, 2023, Ms. Hopkins did not condemn the posts or demonstrate any compassion for community members, particularly Jews, who were rightfully offended and hurt by Khan-Williams’ conduct. Instead, the principal complained about how a parent’s email to multiple staff members, which contained disturbing images of violence against Israelis, was “pulling us away from taking care of our students.”

Ms. Hopkins also expressly denied that antisemitism was a problem at Tilden in her message to the community – even though, as she knew or should have known, Tilden had a history of antisemitic incidents. In January 2023, school officials discovered [swastikas](#) scrawled on desks at Tilden, the second such incident at the school since April 2022.

Ms. Hopkins issued a follow-up message to the community on November 29, 2023, expressing her “regret” that her November 17 message had “failed to convey the depth of concern and empathy I hold for our community.” She also wrote, “Antisemitism or hate of any kind will not be tolerated at Tilden.” But as this complaint demonstrates on pages 12-15, Tilden continued to tolerate antisemitic harassment and intimidation, at the expense of its Jewish community.

MCPS recently reinstated Ms. Khan-Williams, who is now teaching in a different school, at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. Her reinstatement reflects poorly on MCPS’s commitment to addressing antisemitism. It is difficult to imagine that Jewish students would feel safe and welcome in her classes, in any school in MCPS. It is equally difficult to imagine that the lies Ms. Khan-Williams openly promoted about Jews and Israel would not seep into her interactions with students, wherever she teaches in MCPS.

MCPS Places Angela Wolf on Administrative Leave But Then Reinstates Her

In December 2023, MCPS placed Angela Wolf, a teacher at Takoma Park Middle School and the Middle School Director on the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) Board of Directors, on administrative leave based on her antisemitic social media posts. In 2020, Ms. Wolf posted a list of wealthy Montgomery County individuals with Jewish-sounding last names and wrote, “None of these people invented anything useful are [sic] have done a damn thing to further the needs of the community.” Accusing the individuals with Jewish-sounding last names of being “gluttons and thieves,” Ms. Wolf posted, “They accumulate this kind of wealth through abusing workers.”

After the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, Ms. Wolf’s antisemitism intensified. She shared an image of an Israeli tank pointing its cannon at babies in what is labeled “Al-Shifa Neonatal Intensive Care Unit,” with the caption, “Enemy in sight!” The image sent the false and hate-inciting message that Israel is deliberately targeting and murdering innocent Palestinian Arab babies.

In December 2023, Ms. Wolf posted a “shout to the bus operators at Dulles who refused to transport Zionists to the pro Israel [sic] rally.” Ms. Wolf was praising the bus drivers who deliberately walked off the job, leaving hundreds of members of the Detroit Jewish community – who had flown to Washington, DC to march in solidarity with Israel in its war against Hamas – stranded at Dulles International Airport. Ms. Wolf’s reference to “Zionists” was plainly code for Jews.

In a letter to the community on November 13, 2023, Takoma’s principal condemned Ms. Wolf’s social media posts and stated that they “have undermined our school’s values of respect and belonging.” Nevertheless, MCPS recently reinstated Ms. Wolf and transferred her to another

school, Seneca Valley High School, disregarding the harmful impact that this decision would have on Jewish and Israeli members of the MCPS community.⁸ MCPS sent the message to everyone in the community that antisemitism would be overlooked and tolerated in the district.

MCPS Places Anike Robinson on Administrative Leave But Then Reinstates Her

MCPS placed Anike Robinson, an art and sixth grade English teacher at Westland Middle School, on administrative leave in December 2023, based on her social media posts, which the school principal characterized in a message to the school community as “[divisive and in conflict with our school’s core values of kindness, global-mindedness and equity](#).” One of Ms. Robinson’s posts showed a bomb bearing the Jewish Star of David and pointing directly at a child standing amidst bombed buildings – promoting the false notion that Jews/Israelis were deliberately targeting Palestinian Arab children.

Ms. Robinson also reposted a graphic that was [described](#) as follows:

The graphic includes a black and red eye centered and the text, “The world is watching. Palestine will be free,” and, “Colonized peoples across the world stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people against Israel’s settler colonial state-sanctioned apartheid program of genocide back by U.S. imperialism. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free. Decolonization is not a metaphor.”

Ms. Robinson was promoting the lie that Jews are interlopers in the land of Israel when in fact, they are indigenous to the land going back thousands of years. She was also inciting hatred of Israel and Jews by falsely accusing Israel of apartheid⁹ and genocide.¹⁰

In her message to the community, Westland’s principal acknowledged “the negative impact” that Ms. Robinson’s conduct had “on many in our school community.” The principal informed the community that “[o]ur primary concern is the well-being of students, families and staff.”

Nevertheless, in disregard of the negative impact it would have on Jewish and Israeli students, families and staff, MCPS recently reinstated Ms. Robinson to Hallie Wells Middle School. Once again, the district sent the message to the community that promoting the hatred of Jews and Israel would be overlooked and tolerated.

⁸ In addition, Ms. Wolf is still [listed](#) as the Middle School Director of the MCEA’s Board of Directors.

⁹ There is no apartheid in Israel; Jews and Arabs are citizens of Israel with equal rights. Arabs and Jews work side by side in Israel, including in hospitals and universities. If apartheid exists anywhere in the region, it is in those areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, which is free of Jews. Palestinian law prohibits selling land to Jews, making it a crime punishable by death.

¹⁰ The genocide accusation against Israel is as offensive as it is false. Genocide refers to the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group. Israel is not seeking to destroy the Palestinian Arab people in Gaza or anywhere else. Israel’s target is the terrorist group Hamas, which massacred over 1,200 Israelis on October 7, 2023. Indeed, it is Hamas that has genocidal goals; it is openly committed to the murder of every Jew and the elimination of the Jewish state.

MCPS Places Hajur El-Haggan on Administrative Leave But Then Reinstates Her

MCPS's indifference to antisemitism is also reflected in how district officials responded to another staff member's antisemitic conduct. In November 2023, Hajur El-Haggan, a math teacher at Argyle Middle School, appeared at parent-teacher conferences adorned in buttons that read, "Free Palestine" and "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free." Stickers with these slogans were also emblazoned on her laptop.

Ms. El-Haggan kept buttons with these slogans on her desk at school and made them available to her students. In addition, she made the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" part of her work email signature.

Jewish parents were horrified. "Free Palestine" and "From the river to the sea" (referring to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, i.e., Israel) are antisemitic slogans commonly used by Hamas and other terrorist groups to call for Israel's elimination.

After parent-teacher conferences, MCPS placed Ms. El-Haggan on administrative leave. But MCPS did not immediately alert the community and did not take the necessary steps to ensure that students would not be adversely affected by her departure. MCPS provided a long-term substitute teacher, but for several weeks, Ms. El-Haggan's students did not receive instruction in new math concepts and were expected to review previously taught material and to engage in self-guided learning.

Even before Ms. El-Haggan's placement on leave was made public, a Jewish parent – whose spouse had spoken with Ms. El-Haggan at parent-teacher conferences and was upset and shaken by her open support for Israel's destruction – contacted Argyle's principal, James Allrich, and urged him to demonstrate leadership: inform the school community about Ms. El-Haggan's antisemitic conduct, condemn it, and assure the community that Argyle is an inclusive and welcoming place that would not tolerate antisemitism. Mr. Allrich refused to issue a message. When he finally did issue a message weeks later, it was after the media had already reported that Ms. El-Haggan was placed on leave and that she was taking legal action to be reinstated.

In his message to the community, Mr. Allrich emphasized that this was a personnel matter governed by strict privacy laws. Yet one day after his message, a [news article](#) reported that Mr. Allrich had reassured Ms. El-Haggan – who was under investigation for promoting antisemitism – that he would be advocating on her behalf and sending a letter supporting her. The principal showed no concern for how his partisanship would affect the Jewish and Israeli members of his school community.

On January 9, 2024, the PTSA sponsored a Zoom meeting to address parents' concerns about how their children's educational needs would be met in Ms. El-Haggan's absence. Instead, the meeting quickly became a cheering session for Ms. El-Haggan's return. Mr. Allrich led the charge, reportedly telling parents that while he did not have an update on Ms. El-Haggan's situation, "we all hope and pray every day that she will be back in the classroom" –

again showing no regard for how his comments and advocacy for Ms. El-Haggan's return would affect the Jewish and Israeli members of his community.

Anita Lopez, the Restorative Justice Counselor at Argyle, also participated in the Zoom meeting. She not only advocated for Ms. El-Haggan's speedy return to the classroom but also disparaged and marginalized those who objected to the antisemitism that Ms. El-Haggan had openly displayed, describing the objectors as "the other side" who were being "relentless." Ms. Lopez urged parents to be tenacious in their advocacy for Ms. El-Haggan, encouraging them to write letters every day in support of Ms. El-Haggan's return and to have students write letters, too, even if that meant sending the same letter but changing the date. Ms. Lopez provided the parents on the Zoom call with the superintendent's email address and pressed them to be persistent in their communications to the superintendent and the school board because "the other side is loud."

Parents were assured during the Zoom meeting that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be available on request. But when a Jewish parent, horrified by the conduct of Mr. Allrich and Ms. Lopez, requested the recording, it was purportedly "corrupted" and unavailable.

A Jewish parent expressed concerns about what occurred at the Zoom meeting to Greg Mullenholz, MCPS's Director of School Support and Well-Being. Given the conduct of Mr. Allrich and Ms. Lopez, the parent wrote: "It is abundantly clear that Argyle considers the Jewish community 'them' and not a part of 'us.'"

Mr. Mullenholz did not respond to the parent for 11 days. When he did, he offered to "enlist the support of our Restorative Justice specialists" – an offer that would not address the fact that two school officials had openly and enthusiastically expressed their support for a teacher under investigation for promoting antisemitism, and that one of those officials had also vilified the Jewish community. Mr. Mullenholz failed to appreciate that if Ms. Lopez was an example of the restorative justice staff at MCPS, then that staff was not equipped to understand and respond effectively to the concerns of Jewish parents.

Wrongly placing the burden on the Jewish student, Mr. Mullenholz suggested to the Jewish parent and his spouse that they consider moving their child to another classroom if Ms. El-Haggan were reinstated. As Mr. Mullenholz should have known, if anyone were going to be transferred it should be Ms. El-Haggan – to another school, assuming it was appropriate for MCPS to reinstate her at all.

MCPS recently did reinstate Ms. El-Haggan. She was moved to another school in MCPS, Green Castle Elementary School, again showing MCPS's indifference to antisemitism and to the well-being of the Jewish members of the community.

The parents who complained about the conduct of school officials at the Zoom meeting have since decided that for the safety and well-being of their child, they must seek a change in her school. In an email to Mr. Mullenholz, the child's mother wrote, "We are very sad that given the numerous antisemitic incidents we have experienced, Argyle Middle School is not a place

where we feel safe. Our family has endured significant pain and trauma and [our child] needs to be at a school that supports her well-being where she has administrators who provide safe haven.”

Mr. Mullenholz again offered a “restorative conversation” with the principal and the Restorative Justice Counselor. He assured the parent that the school officials’ conduct had been investigated. But as the parent pointed out, the investigation could hardly have been thorough, if it was conducted at all, since she and her husband were the complainants and had never been contacted by the investigators. The parent rejected the “restorative conversation,” writing:

Given that Ms. Lopez herself is a Restorative Justice coach for Argyle Middle School and is responsible for completely destroying any sliver of faith I had that Argyle Middle School cared about its Jewish community members as she threw gasoline on an already volatile situation, I am not confident anything would change. Ms. Lopez, as a restorative justice coach, was the one person on that [Zoom] call who should have been most equipped with tools to de-escalate and support all the afflicted parties and her behavior was the complete opposite. Additionally, I provided Mr. Allrich with many occasions to provide support to Argyle's Jewish community members, and at each opportunity he chose the opposite.

When Mr. Mullenholz responded, he reiterated that an investigation had been conducted, but that he was precluded by personnel privacy laws from disclosing specifics. He did acknowledge that investigations “sometimes require” interviews and the collection of other evidence. But he failed to acknowledge what the Jewish parent had devastatingly shared – that she had lost confidence in the school’s ability to care for and protect her daughter.

MCPS’s Unacceptable Double Standard: Responding Weakly and Ineffectively to the Harassment of Jewish Students, While Responding Forcefully to the Harassment of Other Minority Groups

Despite MCPS’s professed commitment to addressing antisemitism, the harassment and intimidation of Jewish students is still being downplayed and tolerated, even after the Hamas massacre. Here is one painful example.

Tilden Middle School has a program for students who are on the autism spectrum. On January 23, 2024, in a general education science class, students were working on group projects. One group was comprised of two autistic students and one general education student. One of the autistic students, designated herein as “R,” approached the teacher to tell her that the general education student in R’s group was making inappropriate comments. In addition to mocking autistic people, the general education student was making antisemitic comments about Jews and Hitler. Fearful that the general education student would know that R had reported him, R asked the teacher not to respond at that moment. When the paraeducator entered the classroom, R reported the offensive comments to her, too. Contrary to protocol, the paraeducator brought both R and the perpetrator to the school administration.

R explained to administrators that the general education student had told him to “go back to Israel.” The student had also complimented Hitler and said Hitler was fine and had not done enough. While their group was working on building a tower together, they thought their tower might fall. When R laughed, the general education student said to him, “You’re such a classic Jew. You laugh when someone dies or gets hurt.” The student also told R, “You’re acting like Hitler.”

An assistant principal at Tilden called R’s mother to notify her about the incident and assured her that the principal knew about it, too. R’s mother told the assistant principal that she wanted to speak with the principal, Sapna Hopkins. She was understandably concerned about R’s continued safety and well-being in the science class and wanted to know how the school would be supporting her son.

Ms. Hopkins did not call R’s parent until two days later, minutes before the Jewish Sabbath. She showed no empathy, compassion or concern for R’s well-being. She did not reassure R’s mother that R would be kept safe. Instead, Ms. Hopkins immediately sent the message to R’s mother that the call was an obligatory one, opening the conversation with, “I’m calling you because I was told I needed to give you a call.”

When R’s mother asked about next steps, Ms. Hopkins said that the school could offer restorative justice. But R’s mother did not see how it would be beneficial to R to place him in the same room as his bully and she declined the offer.

The principal did not issue a message to the community about the antisemitic comments. She did not make it clear to the community or to R’s parents that his bully would be disciplined. She did not offer support to R. And she did not let the community know that antisemitism would not be tolerated.

Yet on February 20, 2024, Ms. Hopkins did issue a statement to the community about another incident that occurred a few days before, involving one student’s “racially offensive language towards an African-American student.” After reading Ms. Hopkins’ statement, R’s mother emailed the principal to ask her about why she had not followed the same protocol when R was subjected to offensive antisemitic comments. In an email response, the principal said that every situation is different and offered to call R’s mother.

Two days later, again right before the Jewish Sabbath, Ms. Hopkins called R’s mother and showed the same breathtaking indifference and insensitivity, opening the call with, “I’m calling as you keep requesting a call. I don’t think there’s anything more I can tell you.”

When R’s mother asked about how the incident involving her son differed from the incident involving the African American student, the principal could not explain it. When R’s mother asked if the incident involving her son was a hate bias incident, Ms. Hopkins could not give a straight answer to that question either. She eventually claimed that a hate bias form had been filed in R’s case but could not explain why she had failed to issue a message to the community about the incident.

In a follow-up call that R's mother had with the principal and an assistant principal, neither school official was clear about the comments that the school was able to substantiate. It was obvious to R's mother that the school's investigation was shoddy: School officials interviewed the third student in R's science group, but that student could not substantiate that the antisemitic comments were made. Importantly, the student is not Jewish and is also autistic; school officials asked him open-ended questions which may not have been the most productive way to obtain information from him.

When R's mother pressed these school officials about what constitutes hate bias, both readily identified a swastika. But the principal did not understand that telling a Jewish child to go back to Israel was antisemitic. It was clear to R's mother that school officials did not understand the many ways in which antisemitism is expressed today, including relating to Israel.

Recently, Ms. Hopkins again forcefully responded to offensive comments when the target was not Jewish. She issued a message alerting the community to comments that had been made to a student that "could be considered anti-Muslim." The principal made it clear that the conduct would not be tolerated, and that the perpetrator would be disciplined. Ms. Hopkins also assured the community that school officials "have reached out to provide support for the targeted student."

The principal took none of these steps in response to the antisemitic comments that R was subjected to. She treated those comments – and R's safety and well-being – as if they did not matter.¹¹

MCPS's indifference to antisemitism was recently on display when Tilden Middle School – which has struggled with and mishandled numerous antisemitic incidents – issued its weekly newsletter, the [Timberwolf Connection](#), on April 5, 2024. The newsletter updates families on programs and events, including what students would be learning in homeroom for the remainder of the school year.

In connection with the school's effort to educate students about how to respond to prejudice, bigotry and stereotypes, Tilden informed families that homeroom lessons for the rest of the school year would cover the following:

With a focus on the **educate** portion of the Speak Up Protocol, Homeroom lessons will aim to bring awareness to acceptance of differences and learning the context and impact of the following terms – the 'R' word, 'SPED,' and the 'N' word. Students will also be learning about anti-immigrant hate bias and Islamophobia [emphasis in original].

¹¹ Ms. Hopkins also showed an inability to understand antisemitism at a Tilden community meeting on February 24, 2024. The meeting was scheduled to provide parents with an update about MCPS's efforts to address antisemitism. A parent asked Ms. Hopkins why she referred to a swastika as a "racist symbol," rather than identifying it correctly as a symbol of antisemitism. Ms. Hopkins reportedly responded that she "wasn't aware that a swastika was a symbol of antisemitism." A parent who was present at this meeting told us that MCPS officials in attendance were plainly embarrassed by Ms. Hopkins' ignorance, and that "parents were shocked by her continuing inability to grasp how antisemitism impacts Jewish students at Tilden and their parents."

Though well-aware that hatred and bigotry against Jews have been serious and longstanding problems at Tilden, the school shockingly omitted antisemitism from students' homeroom lessons, sending the message to the community that the school and MCPS did not consider antisemitism – unlike other forms of bigotry – worth addressing.

MCPS Endorsed Student Walkouts and Tolerated and Legitimized Other Conduct Which Contributes to the Hostile Antisemitic Environment for Jewish Students

MCPS's policies are clear: While "students have a right to assemble for discussions of issues of importance to them and to demonstrate peacefully," walkouts during the school day are prohibited. MCPS's "A Student's Guide to Rights and Responsibilities" provides: "Any walk-out or departure from campus during the instructional day will be treated as an unexcused absence, given the disruptive impact on school operations."

Yet in the wake of the Hamas massacre and in disregard of MCPS's policies, many schools authorized anti-Israel student walkouts during the school day. The walkouts promoted messages that incited hatred of Jews and Israel, causing many Jewish students to feel unwelcome and unsafe. Fearing for their physical safety, some Jewish students felt compelled to miss their classes and stay home on the day of the walkouts to avoid the hatred and hostility that they correctly anticipated would be expressed toward Jews and Israel.

Instead of taking steps to protect Jewish students and ensure their physical and emotional safety and well-being, MCPS officials acted in ways that exacerbated the hostile antisemitic environment that students were enduring. Examples are below.

Clarksburg High School

A walkout at Clarksburg High School took place during the school day on November 9, 2023, organized by a student group called the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Intended or not, the MSA, with the school's approval, chose a date for the walkout that was insensitive and hurtful: The walkout took place on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the pogrom organized by the Nazis in Germany in 1938, during which Jews were murdered, synagogues were torched, Jewish homes, businesses and schools were vandalized, and approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps.

In an email sent the evening before, the principal notified the community about the upcoming walkout. He said that participation would be an excused absence – a violation of MCPS policy.

The school approved signs that the MSA planned to use at the walkout which, among other things, condoned violence and terrorism against Jews ("By any means necessary" and "Resistance is liberation") and called for the destruction of Israel ("Free free Palestine, occupation is a crime"). The school also approved signs and speeches that demonized Israel with lies, falsely accusing Israel of genocide.

After the walkout, Jewish parents of students at Clarksburg wrote to the principal expressing their concern about how the walkout engendered fear in their children. The letter stated, in part:

By allowing the event you decided to sanction and institutionalize antisemitic tropes and blood libel, such as Jews being responsible for “genocide” and that the only Jewish State of Israel practices “apartheid.” Even worse, chants of “Free Palestine” were echoed throughout the school that day, placing fear and causing duress to our children. . . . Not only did you institutionalize antisemitism, but you also specifically rewarded these students with an excused absence for their event participation.

You allowed for the poisoning of the young minds that our community has entrusted you with the most vile and oldest of lies. These lies have created a hostile learning environment for Jewish kids knowing their classmates have purposely maligned the only Jewish state and the Jewish people with the help of faculty and the administration. They simply don’t feel safe in your school.

While the principal responded and offered to meet with families, he failed to acknowledge that the protest promoted antisemitism and created a hostile environment for his Jewish students. The principal did not issue a statement to the community that condemned the protesters’ conduct or corrected any of the antisemitic lies that students spread about Israel.

Northwood High School

Sponsored by Northwood High School’s MSA, a walkout took place during the school day on November 17, 2023. Northwood’s principal, Jonathan Garrick, alerted the community to the walkout and confirmed that it was “not approved or supported by Northwood or MCPS” and that students who left class for the walkout would receive an unexcused absence. The principal also assured the community that the organizers of the walkout would be “avoiding specific phrases and slogans which could be hurtful or derogatory against other members of our community.”

But the organizers did not avoid those hurtful and derogatory phrases and slogans. The protesters held signs that said, “When people are occupied, resistance is justified” and called for an intifada. These are calls for violence and terrorism against Israelis and Jews. In addition, the protesters falsely accused Israel of committing genocide, deliberately inciting Jew- and Israel-hatred.

Northwood did not issue a statement condemning the protesters for their hateful antisemitic conduct and did not explain to the community why the conduct was derogatory and hurtful to Jewish and Israeli members of the community. Moreover, the school did not hold the protesters accountable for failing to comply with the commitment they had made about how the walkout would be conducted.

Instead, Northwood continued to tolerate and indulge the MSA’s conduct, with no regard for how the conduct was hurting the Jewish community. In March 2024, the MSA sponsored a series of events titled “Muslim Awareness Week,” which included one event they called “Hijab Nova.” Before the start of the school day, MSA students handed out hijabs to students and staff. Several staff members posted photos of themselves wearing the hijabs.

Horrified, a Jewish paraeducator contacted Dr. Garrick a week before the event. She explained that using the word “Nova” to label and publicize the event would unduly hurt the Jewish community at the school and contribute to the hostile antisemitic environment there.

As was reported widely in the media and was thus commonly known, it was at the Nova music festival – where thousands had gathered in Israel on October 7, 2023, to enjoy music, dance, and celebrate life – that the terrorist group Hamas infiltrated Israel’s border and slaughtered, burned to death and raped over 360 innocent people and took approximately 40 people as hostages to Gaza. Even if the MSA’s choice of the word “Nova” was an innocent one, the paraeducator explained to Dr. Garrick, using the term was thoughtless, insensitive, and cruel. If the MSA did not appreciate that using the word “Nova” would cause needless distress to Jewish and Israeli community members, then the adults responsible for overseeing and approving the event should have known better. They should have directed the MSA to refrain from using “Nova” to label and publicize their event.

Dr. Garrick himself recognized that the use of the term was a “terrible coincidence.” Yet he refused the paraeducator’s request that the name be changed, and after the event, he refused to issue a statement to the school community that would acknowledge and explain the pain and hurt caused by the MSA’s insensitive and inappropriate conduct.

Instead, after the event, Dr. Garrick doubled down and created a document in which he seemed to try to justify the MSA’s actions. The document listed the events that the MSA was hosting for the week. In the document’s reference to the hijab event, Dr. Garrick embedded a link to a website called “Nova Hijabs,” an online fashion store that sells hijabs and other Islamic clothing – outlandishly suggesting that the MSA named its event for a clothing company. This was different from the way that the MSA itself explained how it named its event, posting on Instagram that “we wanted a catchy name that will be familiar.”

Dr. Garrick was not only indifferent to the concerns that the paraeducator expressed about the event’s harmful impact on Jewish students and staff; he also became difficult. Initially, he offered to furnish the names of other schools that he claimed were hosting a similar Hijab Nova event – an offer that the paraeducator welcomed and accepted. But Dr. Garrick never followed through, despite the paraeducator’s repeated reminders.

Worse, Dr. Garrick retaliated against the Jewish paraeducator, admonishing her for her presence at the Hijab Nova event, characterizing her conduct as “uncomfortable, confrontational, and unprofessional.” In fact, the paraeducator did not do or say anything that was unprofessional or confrontational at the event. She stood away from the event, alone, wearing a shirt bearing a Star of David, which she had the right to do.

On March 6, 2024, the paraeducator filed a discrimination, harassment, or workplace bullying complaint pursuant MCPS regulations. As of this date, MCPS’s Office of Human Resources has not responded to it. On March 26, 2024, the paraeducator wrote to Dr. Garrick and to several staff in the Office of School Support and Well-Being, expressing concern about antisemitism at Northwood. In response, Sean McGee, Associate Superintendent at the Office of School Support and Well-Being, scheduled a meeting for April 17, 2024, with the paraeducator and Dr. Garrick.

On April 11, 2024, the paraeducator testified before the board of education about antisemitism in Northwood, the hostile environment for Jewish students and staff there, and how the bigotry against Jews was part of a district-wide problem. The paraeducator – who herself attended MCPS schools, as did her three children – urged MCPS to finally address antisemitism in the schools and recommended several steps for district officials to take.

On April 15, 2024, the paraeducator notified Dr. Garrick that a student who had been staring at her, and particularly at her Star of David, since the Hijab Nova event, was still engaging in the conduct, which felt threatening. Dr. Garrick did not reassure the paraeducator about her safety and well-being. Instead, he emailed her before school hours on April 16, 2024, advising her to report to his office upon her arrival at school that day.

Dr. Garrick gave the paraeducator a letter dated April 16, 2024, from Mr. McGee, notifying her that she was being placed on administrative leave with pay, “based on allegations of inappropriate behavior.” The letter advised the paraeducator that she was not permitted to be on school grounds during the leave, or on any MPCPS property, and she was directed not to contact any staff, students, or parents of students during the leave.

MCPS did not identify the paraeducator’s “inappropriate behavior” that purportedly led to these sanctions. But the district’s conduct appears to be retaliatory, following from the paraeducator’s legitimate efforts to stand up to antisemitism in MCPS and the harm it is causing to Jewish students and staff.

Sherwood High School

A walkout at Sherwood High School was scheduled for November 29, 2023, organized by Warriors for Human Rights, an outside group unaffiliated with the school. A Jewish student group and Jewish staff at the school reportedly scheduled a meeting with the principal, to express their concerns about the walkout and urge that it be cancelled. At the last minute, the meeting was cancelled, and the principal met with a Jewish staff member and a rabbi instead.

On November 27, 2023, during morning announcements, a student reported that the walkout has been cancelled. But later that morning, the plan changed: The principal sent an email to the community, notifying them that the walkout would take place, that it had not been approved or supported by the school, and that students who attended would receive an unexcused absence.

The principal assured the community that the organizers understood that they should refrain from using phrases and slogans that would be “hurtful or derogatory” to members of the community. Yet on social media, Warriors for Human Rights falsely and outrageously posted, “There is no country called Israel” and “‘Israel’ is a group of Zionist Jewish people from all over the world & dont [sic] have a state.” In addition to denying Israel’s right to exist, Warriors for Human Rights openly called for Israel’s elimination, posting, “We want liberation, we want our lands back. All of PALESTINE. From the river to the sea.”

Sherwood officials failed to condemn the group’s antisemitic conduct and most importantly, failed to cancel the walkout that this outside group was organizing at the school. A Jewish parent in the community wrote to the principal to express concern about the walkout going forward, explaining that “this specific walkout only serves to intimidate and create a bigger divide.” The parent asked the principal what steps the school would be taking to ensure that Jewish students would feel safe and that rules would be followed. The principal did not respond.

After the walkout, the principal issued a statement about the walkout, commending the approximately 80 students for “demonstrating peacefully.” In fact, the walkout was not peaceful; it disrupted the normal operations of the school. One parent told us that her son was in his AP World History class at the time of the walkout and could not take any notes for the entire class period because the protesters’ chanting was so loud and disruptive.

Springbrook High School

A walkout took place at Springbrook High School on November 17, 2023, during the school day, in violation of MCPS policy. During the walkout, the student protesters chanted the antisemitic slogan that calls for Israel’s destruction: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” The protesters demonized Israel with lies to encourage hatred of the Jewish state, holding signs that falsely accused Israel of colonialism, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

At least one MCPS official plainly did not understand the district’s own rules and policies. After MCPS received an anonymous complaint prior to the walkout, Mary R. Whalen, Supervisor of the Department of System-Wide Safety and Emergency Management, emailed Springbrook’s principal to alert her to the complaint so that she would not be “blind-sided.” Ms. Whalen wrote, “I know that your hands are tied when student planned walk outs pop up. Apparently, your staff don't know that when these events come along, your job is to keep everyone safe while students invoke their constitutional right to free speech. I wanted to make it clear that you have not done anything wrong.”

In fact, as Ms. Whalen should have known, the principal’s hands were not tied. While students have a constitutional right to free speech, that right is not without its limits. As MCPS [policy](#) provides: “The rights of freedom of expression in dress, writing, and other forms are balanced with the responsibility to maintain an environment conducive to learning.” While Ms. Whalen correctly understood that the principal was obligated to keep everyone safe, the principal failed to fulfill that obligation. She failed to alert staff to the upcoming walkout so that staff would be prepared should there be any disturbances, including calls for or actual violence.

Failing to alert staff was such a serious omission that it prompted one Jewish teacher at the school to email the administration about it. The teacher was so upset and offended by the walkout and by the way the school handled it, that she had to leave school early that day. When she later contacted the administration, she also asked whether the administration had vetted the speeches and signs before the walkout.

The principal knew that the walkout would create a hostile and even threatening environment for the school's Jewish students. Prior to the walkout, a Jewish community member emailed the principal and other MCPS officials, urging them to "cancel the walk out immediately" and gave a clear and simple reason: "This walk out will only make your Jewish students and staff feel even more unwelcome and unsafe than they already feel. How do you expect the Jews in your school community to come to school each day when you have permitted students to 'walk out' in support of their murder and the destruction of Israel?"

As was typical, MCPS disregarded the security and welfare of its Jewish students and staff. Springbrook permitted the walkout to proceed though knowing that it would exacerbate an already hostile environment for its Jewish community.

Montgomery Blair High School

A walkout was scheduled to take place at Montgomery Blair High School on November 19, 2023. Though it did not go forward, the two student group organizers still managed to create a hostile and unwelcoming environment for Jewish students at the school. One of the student groups, the MSA, openly encouraged violence against Israelis and Jews, posting on Instagram: "If the enemy occupies the land of the Muslims, then fighting becomes OBLIGATORY upon every able person until the enemy is repelled from the land. This is known as defensive Jihad."

The other student group, Blazers for Human Rights, posted an outrageous antisemitic lie on Instagram: ISRAEL IS SKINNING THE BODIES OF KILLED PALESTINIANS! WHAT DOES IT USE THEIR SKIN FOR?" As a concerned member of the community wrote to the school administration, this post "involves the propagation of blood libel, which is not only offensive but also goes against the principles of inclusivity, respect, and understanding that our school community strives to uphold." The community member requested that the school investigate, take appropriate action against the student group, and "engage in educational initiatives that promote cultural sensitivity and awareness to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future."

School officials did not even respond to this community member. They also failed to alert the community to Blazers for Human Rights' antisemitic conduct, failed to sanction the group for deliberately promoting antisemitic lies, and failed to send a clear and forceful message to the community that antisemitism would not be tolerated.

Paint Branch High School

The walkout at Paint Branch High School took place during the school day on November 10, 2023. The school permitted it to go forward, even though it was not clear whether the walkout was even organized by a student group at Paint Branch.

The principal, Pamela Krawczel, announced the walkout in an email and said that absences due to participation in the walkout were excused – again, a violation of MCPS’s policies. After the walkout, Ms. Krawczel described it glowingly: “Paint Branch staff were present to ensure that this was a supportive, peaceful and respectful event.”

Minutes after the principal issued this message, the MSA’s faculty sponsor – who happens to be Jewish – informed her that the walkout was anything but “supportive, peaceful and respectful.” During the walkout, the faculty sponsor heard one student say, “We should bring Hitler back,” and another student say, “Kill the Jews.”

The faculty sponsor requested that Ms. Krawczel send another email to the community, alerting them to these antisemitic comments and making it clear that such comments would not be tolerated. “As educators we MUST undo years of teaching of hate against those who were once persecuted for who they were and what they believe. This of course includes the Jews,” the faculty sponsor [implored](#).

The principal rejected the faculty sponsor’s plea, [writing](#), “I really don’t think that it would be appropriate to send out another email to address the behavior of two students. We can certainly address the comments made by those two students.” Though knowing from the faculty sponsor that students had made hateful and violent threats against Jews, the principal sent an email to all staff, praising the organizers as “[fantastic](#)” and falsely stating that the protesters “[advocat\[ed\] for respect for all people](#).”

The MSA’s faculty sponsor expressed her surprise about the principal’s positive message, given the antisemitic comments she had reported to the principal, and [wrote](#), “Forgive me Ms. Krawczel, but I don’t see a comment about what we spoke about in your office.” Again, the principal ignored the antisemitic comments that were reported to her and sent a message to parents that praised the protesters for their “fantastic job.”

The school purportedly investigated the antisemitic comments that the MSA’s faculty sponsor had reported hearing. The one student who could be identified by the faculty sponsor was questioned and – no surprise – denied making an antisemitic comment. The school concluded that no student made the antisemitic comment or anything like it – taking the word of a student – who plainly had incentive to lie – over the word of the faculty sponsor – who had no incentive to do anything but tell the truth about what she witnessed at the walkout.

MCPS has Retaliated Against Jewish Teachers who Have Raised Concerns about Antisemitism

When Jewish teachers have raised concerns about antisemitism in their schools and encouraged school officials to respond appropriately and effectively to the bigotry, MCPS has not been receptive to those concerns or shown a commitment to address the concerns. Instead, MCPS has sometimes retaliated against these teachers. This complaint already described (on pages 17-18), the hostility and retaliation that a Jewish paraeducator at Northwood High School has been enduring ever since she expressed legitimate concern about the MSA's "Hijab Nova" event and about the antisemitic hostility that Jewish students and staff are facing at Northwood and throughout the district.

Consider also what has happened to the MSA's Jewish faculty sponsor at Paint Branch High School who reported to the principal that students praised Hitler and called for the murder of Jews at a school-sanctioned "pro-Palestinian" walkout. (See page 21, above.) Instead of condemning the conduct and making every effort to identify the student perpetrators so that they could be held accountable, school officials retaliated against the MSA's faculty sponsor.

School officials blamed the faculty sponsor for being the source for an article about the walkout which was published in The Daily Wire. But as school officials knew, the source was the school's principal herself. The Daily Wire had filed a public records request for the principal's emails about the walkout, which were produced.

The principal also wrongly suggested that the faculty sponsor was to blame for the Daily Wire article mentioning the name of the student who allegedly made the Hitler comment at the walkout. But as the article explicitly stated, the student's name was in an email that MCPS produced to The Daily Wire in response to its public records request.

Though knowing that the faculty sponsor engaged in no wrongdoing, school officials nevertheless placed a "Summary of Concern" memorandum in her personnel file, in which they advised her that "you are no longer to serve as the sponsor of MSA. Do not interact with any students in the MSA. Do not post any pictures of PBHS students."

In addition to the obvious pain and suffering that school officials needlessly caused to the faculty sponsor, their wrongful sanctions interfered with the faculty sponsor's ability to perform her job. She was prevented from entering a classroom to work with special education students because an MSA member was present. And she was wrongly rebuked again, when the assistant principal baselessly accused her of conversing with an MSA member about his class schedule. It was the assistant principal who was in the wrong, confusing the student speaking with the faculty sponsor with the student who allegedly praised Hitler, because both students shared a first name.

MCPS also retaliated against another Jewish teacher at Walter Johnson High School after he raised concerns about a comment in an article – published in The Pitch, the school's student paper – which justified Hamas' massacre. The article, titled "Student Groups Respond to Israel-Hamas Crisis," focused on the reactions of three student groups – the Jewish Student Union, the MSA, and Middle Eastern North African Club (MENA) – to Hamas' attack and Israel's

response. The article included a quote from an anonymous member of MENA and the MSA: “As a Muslim and Arab myself, I can say we feel very devastated at the thousands of lives of Palestinian men, women and children being lost. I can also say [I am] very angry at how people are reacting, victimizing the oppressor as if they were attacked, and as if this was not a response to 75 years of oppression and over 20 years of Palestinians living in concentration camps and open air prison[s].”

The Jewish teacher penned a thoughtful response to the article, which included his respectful disagreement with the anonymous statement: “In my opinion, whether intentionally or not, the person that said this justified the murder of 1200 Israelis. This person condoned the kidnapping of 240 people, the devastation that occurred at the music festival where innocent people were slaughtered, and the massacres that happened at multiple kibbutzim.”

After explaining respectfully why he disagreed with the statement, the teacher encouraged all students to engage in dialogue, to share their thoughts and feelings, and to listen to one another. He made it clear that he would like to facilitate dialogue and understanding, and he encouraged students to stop by his classroom to talk with him about their feelings or to reach out to him by email. The teacher assured students that “I am a good listener and am always trying to find a solution.” He also said that if students wanted to schedule a group meeting, “I will provide the coffee, hot chocolate, tea, doughnuts, etc.”

The paper published the teacher’s response, without any edits, on December 15, 2023. Three days later, the acting principal contacted the teacher, advising him that he was being placed on administrative leave. The acting principal claimed that the teacher’s response to the article created a hostile environment in the classroom. In an investigation of the incident which led to this decision, the acting principal told the investigator that students were crying hysterically in her office, and they maintained that they had been maligned by the teacher and could not feel safe in his classroom.

In fact, the teacher had not maligned anyone, as a thorough investigation would have shown. Rather than interview the students who claimed to have been maligned, the investigator simply relied on what the acting principal had to say. The teacher’s response to the article could not have been more supportive of all students, regardless of their views about Hamas and Israel. The teacher encouraged all students to express their feelings respectfully and to listen to one another – an effort that he was enthusiastically willing to facilitate.

Instead of championing this Jewish teacher, MCPS wrongly made him pay a price for respectfully expressing his view that Hamas’ massacre could not be justified. He enjoyed teaching English in one of the district’s top high schools and was forced to return to teaching middle school.

MCPS has Failed to Provide Students and Staff with Necessary Antisemitism Training and Has Not Supported Efforts to Implement Such Training

On January 21, 2023, MCPS, the Superintendent and the Board of Education issued a [statement](#) condemning “all acts of antisemitism in any form.” The statement acknowledged the

“repeated acts of hate” and emphasized the importance of “learn[ing] and understand[ing] what antisemitism, hatred, and racism are and the harm they cause.”

MCPS could not have been clearer: “We must do more, and we will” and it committed to “continue our efforts to educate our students about antisemitism.” Also, the district purported to appreciate the devastating impact of antisemitism on Jewish students and pledged to ensure that Jewish students would feel safe and welcome:

To learn and to do so at high levels, all students must feel physically and, yes, emotionally safe. When they experience anxiety because of acts of hatred, they can’t be at their best in their classroom. **We must embrace the work necessary to ensure our scholars are in safe and welcoming school environments** [emphasis added].

But MCPS failed to embrace the work it understood was crucial. To date, the district has not provided the training that both students and staff need to understand and recognize antisemitism, which is the first step to effectively addressing the problem.

Even when MCPS made some effort to acknowledge and address antisemitism, it did so poorly and inadequately. In October 2023, the director of MCPS’s Equity Unit announced that the equity team had drafted a “Glossary of Terms for Race, Diversity, and Equity,” which was part of MCPS’s commitment to “promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.” The glossary included antisemitism, but the term was misspelled, signaling a lack of care on the equity team’s part. Also, the glossary’s definition of antisemitism was incomplete, failing, for example, to recognize antisemitism related to Israel. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism does recognize that hatred of Jews can be expressed today as hatred of the Jewish state of Israel. The IHRA definition is internationally accepted – and it was [adopted](#) in November 2022, by Montgomery County, which acknowledged it as a “statement of guidance and educational tool to help combat antisemitism.” But MCPS has refused to use the IHRA definition.

MCPS’s resources for staff, students and families continued to be flawed and inaccurate. Even when errors were brought to the district’s attention, MCPS did not correct them. For example, MCPS distributed a document titled “Israel/Palestine: Avoiding Antisemitic [sic] and Islamophobic Hate Speech” to parents at a Tilden Middle School community meeting in November 2023, in response to the alarming rise in antisemitism at Tilden. MCPS also made this document available to all families in the district on its website (on the “Equity Matters” page).

But MCPS misspelled “antisemitic” in the title of the document, raising the question of how the district could possibly be counted on to address antisemitism if it could not even correctly spell it. In addition, MCPS’s document misinformed Tilden’s staff, students and families by repeatedly referring to “Palestine” as if it were a state equivalent to the sovereign state of Israel. As MCPS knows or should have known – Palestine is a region; it is not and never has been a sovereign state. In 135 CE, the Romans gave the name “Palestine” (“Palaestina”) to

the land that had always been known as Judea, to erase the Jewish people’s connection to that land.

In the same document, MCPS irresponsibly promoted the falsehood that “Anti-Zionism is not always antisemitic (for example, if someone is generally anti-nationalism and believes in abolishing nation-states).” But anti-Zionists are not commonly anti-nationalists; they are simply anti-Israel and oppose the existence of a Jewish state. As the internationally accepted IHRA working definition of antisemitism makes clear, singling out the one Jewish state in the world for condemnation, and denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination – a right that is recognized for other groups of people – is antisemitic.

Since November 2023, a Jewish parent has been urging MCPS officials to correct the references to “Palestine” in the district’s “educational” resources and has been providing officials with a detailed explanation as to why the references are incorrect. As the parent wrote in an email to MCPS officials, “How can parents trust MCPS to educate our kids on truth/accuracy (not to mention identifying trusted sources of information) when it is clear that MCPS staff are not receiving the educational materials they need to convey complex information and handle sensitive issues like antisemitism?”

MCPS finally removed this document from its website on February 29, 2024. But MCPS’s “Equity Matters” page still contains many erroneous references to “Palestine.” The same Jewish parent raised this issue again with MCPS officials, but they have not responded to the parent or corrected the error.

In January 2024, the Montgomery County Jewish Educators Alliance (MCJEA), led by Andrew Winter, principal of Ritchie Park Elementary School in MCPS, held eight meetings which culminated in an eight-page document that described needed reforms to combat antisemitism in MCPS. The MCJEA sent this document to the then-superintendent, the board of education, and several senior MCPS administrators. Reportedly, there was little if any response to the MCJEA’s recommendations, nor any effort on MCPS’s part to engage with the MCJEA and work together on responding to a problem that MCPS had acknowledged, the year before, as an imperative to address.

In February 2024, the MCJEA released a letter addressed to the MCPS administration, expressing the group’s continued interest in mandatory training for all MCPS staff. The letter – supported by more than 1,500 teachers, students, parents and community members – explained why the training was essential:

Over the course of this school year, to date, there have been 268 occurrences of hate bias incidents. Of the 268 incidents, 92 of these incidents (or 34%) have been identified as antisemitic. Seventy-three of these antisemitic incidents in MCPS have occurred since the terrorist attacks on October 7th in Israel by Hamas. It is important to note that the Jewish population in Montgomery County is roughly 10%. These numbers are alarming and disturbing. **Antisemitism is occurring at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school), and the data that we shared is only the reported incidents.** Anecdotally, we are acutely

aware that there have been unreported, painful microaggressions against Jewish students and staff, and antisemitic rhetoric on social media (inclusive of using accounts that include MCPS school names). In addition, there has been significant disruption to the learning environment – as well to Jewish students’ feeling of safety – brought on by the walkouts for Palestine and related chants [emphasis added].

In March 2024, MCPS released its schedule of training for the upcoming year. Training in understanding, identifying, and responding effectively to antisemitism was not included. In a memorandum to the board of education dated March 19, 2024, the interim superintendent provided “an update on the district’s work to prevent and address hate-bias.” Appended to the memorandum was an “action plan” for educating, preventing, and addressing race and hate-bias. The action plan does not include a single reference to training for staff or students about how to recognize antisemitism in all its contemporary manifestations, or how to effectively respond to antisemitism when it arises. In fact, the action plan does not mention antisemitism at all. Instead, there is a section of the action plan directed to building an understanding of MCPS’s diversity, which includes a segment that is strangely titled, “Understanding Jewish Students.”

During the last legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly considered two bills that would have encouraged students’ and staff’s understanding of antisemitism and its history. The first, House Bill 1181/Senate Bill 1058, would have required schools to incorporate lessons on the Holocaust into social studies curricula, including the events that led to it and roots of antisemitism. The second, House Bill 1386, initially would have required school districts to provide antisemitism training to school employees. The bill’s language was modified to require “antibias training.” This second bill passed as modified. MCPS’s board of education opposed both bills.

Because of MCPS’s History of Indifference to the Many Efforts Made to Remedy Antisemitism, OCR’s Action is Needed

This complaint describes in detail not only the severe, persistent and pervasive pattern of antisemitic harassment and intimidation that Jewish students have been subjected to in MCPS, but also the many efforts that members of the community have made over the years to compel the district to acknowledge and effectively address these problems. Deeply concerned about MCPS’s abysmal response to antisemitism, parents in Montgomery County organized themselves and created the Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition (MoCo JPC) in 2021. They too have faced indifference and even hostility from MCPS officials in response to their efforts to ensure that Jewish students are provided with the safe and welcoming learning environment that every student deserves.

Since its inception, MoCo JPC has been encouraging MCPS to create and implement antisemitism training and education for staff and to enhance the curriculum for students with

content about antisemitism and Jewish history. Members of MoCo JPC have a background in Jewish history and education and offered to help. But MCPS officials rejected these efforts.¹²

On November 30, 2022, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington and MCPS sponsored a Jewish town hall meeting – titled “MCPS Anti-Racist Audit Community Conversation” – which was scheduled to be an “online conversation with members of Montgomery County’s Jewish community.” At the meeting, however, John Landesman, MCPS’s Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, reportedly discouraged Jewish community members from speaking up about antisemitism and scolded them when they tried to share their experiences with antisemitism, directing them to focus on racism against Black people only.

When MCPS hosted an anti-hate town hall meeting on January 24, 2024, it went no better. A parent who attended remotely reported that Jewish students were mentioned only once, in the context of listing all the groups that may be targets of hate crimes. Antisemitism was never addressed or even acknowledged as a problem. When the parent posted a question about antisemitism in the chat box, she was informed that antisemitism was not on the agenda for the anti-hate town hall meeting.

As described above on page 6, MCPS commissioned a two-year study resulting in an “[Antiracist System Action Plan](#)” that was issued in April 2023. MoCo JPC urged MCPS to include antisemitism in that audit or to complete a separate but parallel audit on antisemitism, but MCPS refused. While other minority groups had grassroots representation on the audit steering committee, there was no grassroots representation from the Jewish community. It was only with MoCo JPC’s repeated urging that MCPS finally agreed to have a Jewish representative on the committee. But the action plan that MCPS ultimately issued never mentioned Jews or racism against Jews.

For years, members of MoCo JPC have been emailing MCPS administrators and testifying regularly at the board of education’s monthly meetings, to bring attention to ongoing antisemitism and the urgent need to address the problem. These efforts have intensified since the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, with no improvement in the board’s indifferent response.

¹² Initiated by parents in the district, MCPS officials held two curriculum meetings by Zoom with a group of parents, one on December 18, 2023, and the second on March 20, 2024. Neither meeting resulted in any changes to the curriculum that would help students understand antisemitism in all its forms.

At the first meeting, parents encouraged adding more Jewish history to the curriculum, beyond teaching about the Holocaust, and they suggested books, none of which were added to the curriculum. At both the first and second meetings, an MCPS official (the head of social studies) informed parents that the social studies curriculum had been supplemented to educate students about antisemitism. But when asked at the first meeting about the definition of antisemitism that MCPS was using as a resource and guide, the official could not answer the question. When asked at the second meeting, the same official responded that the district was using the Holocaust Museum’s definition. When a member of the parent group asked if it was the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, the official simply repeated her first answer, indicating that she had not bothered to truly understand how MCPS was incorporating antisemitism into the curriculum. As one participant reported to us, some officials were late to the second meeting, and the social studies head was eating her breakfast during the meeting, sending the message that MCPS was not taking the meeting or its purpose too seriously. This participant told us that “it was clear that they [MCPS officials] did not want to be there.”

Every month since November 2023, at least two community members have testified about antisemitism in MCPS before the board of education. The board reportedly has a long history of indifference to the testimony. As the leader of MoCo JPC told us, “They ignore us, don’t react, and talk about other things.” This parent leader, who has been fighting antisemitism in MCPS even before her children were old enough to attend school in the district, described MCPS’s response to antisemitism as “systemic neglect.” That neglect must finally stop.

Conclusion

We respectfully urge you to investigate the years of antisemitic harassment and intimidation in MCPS and to hold MCPS accountable under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act for failing to effectively address these problems. Please contact us at (212) 481-1500 or by email at mklein@zoa.org (Morton Klein) or stuchman@zoa.org (Susan Tuchman) if you have questions or need additional information.

Jewish members of the MCPS community, many of whom contributed to this complaint, are counting on OCR to ensure that Jewish students in MCPS are finally provided with the safe and welcoming learning environment that they are legally entitled to and that every student deserves. We are in contact with Jewish community members and can help arrange interviews with them, so that OCR can hear from them directly about what they and their children have been enduring as a result of severe, persistent and pervasive antisemitism in MCPS and the district’s pattern of inaction and indifference to the problem.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice

cc: The Honorable Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (via email)