



HoCoJAG
Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

September 27, 2024

Dear Candidate,

The Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group (HoCoJAG) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization focused exclusively on combating antisemitism in Howard County, Maryland.

Jewish families today face a level of antisemitism not seen since World War II. In HoCo, hate crimes against Jews (already the most frequent victims) surged 750% in the last quarter of 2023. An HCPSS teacher forced students to read aloud poems that denigrate Israel and Jews. HCPSS students held rallies calling for the ethnic cleansing of half of the world's remaining Jews, often punctuated by antisemitic slurs. HCPSS Administration and the Office of DEI, rather than teaching students how to engage in constructive dialog, abandoned a minority under siege and allowed HCPSS to become a hostile environment for Jewish students and staff. As a result, HCPSS is now under federal Title VI investigation for potential civil rights violations.

We appreciate Superintendent Barnes' recent [statement](#) on controversial issues and student rights and believe it is a step in the right direction. This survey suggests additional steps to help ensure that Jews and other minority groups will not face the bullying, intimidation, discrimination, and marginalization that Jews were subjected to this past school year. We ask you, as a candidate for Board of Education, whether you support these steps, and if not, what alternatives you can offer to make HCPSS a place where **all** students (including Jews) feel safe, welcome, nurtured, and included.

We realize that a great deal is asked of candidates and are grateful for your time and responses. We will share all responses publicly and will endorse candidates who commit to taking these steps and other concrete actions to fight antisemitism. For a response to be considered for endorsement, it must be received by October 13th.

Thank you and we look forward to your response,

The Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group (HoCoJAG)
<https://www.hocojag.org>



Board of Education 2024 General Election Survey

Please review the following proposed policy changes and indicate your support or opposition and explain why:

1. HCPSS Policy [1010](#) (Anti-Discrimination)

For no minority group or protected class, do we allow others, or their chosen tokens, to define what is hurtful to that group. We propose the following:

- a. Title VI does not just ban discriminatory harassment and a hostile environment; it also bans inconsistent treatment of different identity groups. * Amend policy 1010 to clarify whether decisions regarding discrimination hinge on the intent of the speaker or the effect on the audience. HCPSS cannot apply a different standard to Jews than to other groups.
- b. Adopt and include by reference the entirety of the [IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism](#) as the official HCPSS guide for what is antisemitic. The IHRA definition is the only definition that is widely used and accepted, including by the [United States government](#), virtually all western democracies, and most US states.
- c. Refer disputes over what is antisemitic to outside subject matter experts or organizations such as the [American Jewish Congress](#), [Anti-Defamation League](#), the [Brandeis Center](#), or other nationally recognized authorities on antisemitism who represent and have the support of a majority of the Jewish community.
- d. Recognize that using coded words, phrases, slurs, or symbols to refer to an identifiable minority group or call for violence against that group are equivalent to referring to the group or violence against it directly.
 - i. Example code words: Zionist as Jew, Inner City as Black
 - ii. Example phrases: The South Will Rise Again, From the River to the Sea

- e. Recognize that demonizing, delegitimizing, or applying a double-standard to an identifiable group is inherently discriminatory as set forth in Natan Sharansky's 3D Test for Antisemitism .
 - i. Demonization example: suggesting that a group is inherently racist, terrorist, evil, or otherwise malign.
 - ii. De-legitimization example: asserting that a group has no right to exist, to self-determination, or to other basic human rights afforded others.
 - iii. Applying double-standards: holding an identifiable group to a higher standard than similar groups.

- f. Track and report discrimination annually:
 - i. All incident statistics for each protected class.
 - ii. A written mitigation plan for protected classes experiencing discrimination at a disproportionate rate.

2. HCPSS Policy [1080](#) (Educational Equity)

A) Section I, Paragraph 2 - Update to include **antisemitism**.

I. Policy Value Statement

The Board acknowledges that educational equity is impacted by a multitude of discriminatory practices that are long-standing and systemic in nature. Systemic racism, **antisemitism**, ableism, sexism, implicit and explicit bias, institutional barriers, and other oppressive practices are significant contributors to inequitable outcomes for students.

B) Section III, A, 2. - Update to include **Jewish community**.

The addition of "minoritized religious groups" would be a welcomed addition, it does incorporate all religions. However, the term is incomplete because it does not encapsulate the entire "**Jewish community**", a broader term that does.

Not all Jews practice the religion, and they are certainly Jews. "Judaism" is a religion, "Jewish" is a shared ancestry and cultural heritage. There are atheist and agnostic Jews who do not practice the religion and are proud of their Jewish heritage.

The BOE has previously utilized the term "**Jewish community**":

<https://www.hcpss.org/diversity/>

"The Board passed a resolution on July 9, 2020, to "denounce any bias and racism toward African American, Asian American, Latino American, Muslim American, LGBTQ+ community, the **Jewish community** and any other groups who have been ignored, marginalized, discriminated against and/or oppressed

and allocate resources in accordance with these values as a school system and a Board.”

At a minimum Policy 1080 should be updated to include “**and ethnic**” groups. Notably, other minority and ethnic groups are specifically named in the policy and updates are proposed for additional inclusion The “**Jewish community**” should be included as well. The hatred toward our community is over 2,000-year old and is “The World’s Oldest Hatred.” The policy should be updated to recognize this. Suggested update:

“Provide culturally responsive and relevant curriculum inclusive of but not limited to perspectives from Black, Asian American, **Native Hawaiian**, and Pacific Islander, **Hispanic/Latinx**, **LGBTQIA+**, **Jewish community**, indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, **minoritized religious and ethnic groups**, other marginalized and oppressed peoples excluded or underrepresented in the current curriculum.”

C) **Section III, C, 3.** Update to include systematic **antisemitism**.

Suggested update:

“Provide ongoing professional learning focusing on factors influencing educational equity, such as anti-bias, anti-racism, cultural proficiency, cultural responsiveness, disability acceptance, **harmful or discriminatory actions against religious groups including, but not limited to antisemitism or Islamophobia**, implicit bias, explicit bias, racial equity, and systemic racism and **antisemitism** for all staff.

3. **HCPSS Policies 9460 and 7140** (Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, & Intimidation):

- a. Per [OCR guidance](#), change: Bullying, harassment, hatred, and intimidation may be offenses committed **against an identifiable group** as well as against individuals.
- b. Add: Calls for violence against an identifiable group or support for organizations that call for such violence are inherently intimidating to members of that group.

4. **HCPSS Policy 9020** (Students’ Rights and Responsibilities)

- a. Clarify: bullying, intimidation, harassment, discrimination, and other violations of HCPSS policies 1010 and 9460 are conduct violations and not protected speech.
- b. Revise implementation guidelines to require that students planning Political Activity that might be viewed as disruptive or hostile to any individual or group of students must provide in writing:

- i. Reasonable advance notice to administration and the student body of no less than five school days.
 - ii. Details of the planned activity, specifying the topic, time, place, names of organizers, student speakers, other invited speakers, expected group size, organizer's plan to maintain discipline, organizer's plan to not create a hostile environment for fellow students.
 - iii. The education value of allowing the event on campus and why it is the most appropriate venue for that Political Activity.
 - iv. The potential for the Political Activity to lead to disturbance by the group engaged in the activity or by other students who may view the activity as hostile, threatening, or demeaning.
 - v. A plan to ensure that the event will be carried out as specified, that behavior will be peaceful, and that it will not create a hostile environment.
 - vi. Consideration of whether the event is likely to be viewed as intimidation or threatening to others.
- c. Failure to comply with policies, including 1010, 9460, and 9020 may lead to disciplinary action including revocation of organizers' right to organize subsequent events.

5. **HCPSS Policy [7030](#)** (Employee Conduct and Discipline)

HCPSS serves primarily minors and operates in loco parentis. Employees, particularly those in instructional roles, have a legal and moral obligation to ensure the well-being of all students. Political expression, particularly by those with power over others, is fraught with risk of abuse. Personal and political expression by HCPSS employees must not undermine the core HCPSS values and mission to ensure that **all** students experience a safe, nurturing, welcoming, and inclusive environment. Therefore:

- Personal and political displays and expression by HCPSS employees must not express a preference for one student group over another or implicitly exclude, demean, discriminate against, threaten, or marginalize an identifiable group.
- Additionally, HCPSS is a public institution serving the interests of the people of Howard County. It is not a vehicle for HCPSS staff to advance their personal or political policies or preferences and its resources should not be used for that purpose.. Therefore, to the extent permitted by law, HCPSS employees should be restricted from:
 - Using HCPSS resources to advance their personal or political preferences.
 - Presenting controversial issues to students in their official capacity other than as set forth in HCPSS policy [8050](#).
 - Coercing or compelling students or other employees to express specific opinions on political, intellectual, or social issues.

6. Title VI compliance

per the [Office of Civil Rights](#) (speaking to schools and universities):

- *It is your legal obligation under Title VI to address prohibited discrimination against students and others on your campus—including those who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Israeli, Muslim, Arab, or Palestinian*
- *Title VI's protection from race, color, and national origin discrimination extends to students who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived: (i) **shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics**; or (ii) citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.*
- *The fact that harassment may involve conduct that includes speech in a public setting or speech that is also motivated by political or religious beliefs, however, **does not relieve a school of its obligation to respond under Title VI** as described below, if the harassment creates a hostile environment in school for a student or students.*
- *To meet its obligation, a university can, among other steps, communicate its opposition to stereotypical, derogatory opinions; provide counseling and support for students affected by harassment; or take steps to establish a welcoming and respectful school campus,...*

Jews should not have to reject a [core part of their religion and identity](#) in order to be included and accepted. What concrete steps should HCPSS take to fulfill obligations under Title VI to ensure that Jewish students do not experience a hostile environment, and ensure instead that Jewish students experience the same welcoming, nurturing, and inclusive environment that HCPSS strives to achieve with other protected classes?

References:

- [HCPSS Policies](#)
- [IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism](#)
- [Natan Sharansky's 3Ds of Antisemitism](#)
- [OCR Guidance November 2023](#)
- [OCR Guidance May 2024](#)