

TO: St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) Board of Education; Interim Supt. Dr. John Thein
FROM: 531 SPPS stakeholders
DATE: Dec. 10, 2024
RE: Take action to address antisemitism in SPPS schools

Dear Dr. Thein and Members of the St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education:

We are St. Paul Public Schools students, parents/guardians, educators, staff, taxpayers, and alumni. Many of us are Jewish, but some of us are not. We are sending you this letter to ask you to take action to make SPPS a safer and more inclusive environment for Jewish students and staff.

Last month, the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) passed a divisive [resolution](#) that erased Jewish experiences and [promoted](#) the terrorist organization Hamas' narrative describing the October 7, 2023, invasion of Israel as "multiple resistance organizations in Gaza revolt[ing] against Israel." This narrative justifies the killing, kidnapping, and rape of innocent people, normalizing the worst antisemitic massacre since the Holocaust.

Before the vote, Jewish SPFE members read a [letter](#) from the rabbis of St. Paul's most prominent synagogues, warning "this resolution makes [the St. Paul Jewish community] feel less safe and secure in our schools and homes." Contradicting the Jewish community's most respected leaders, the resolution's proponents – adults responsible for teaching our kids – claimed their justification of October 7 was somehow consistent with "building a safer world for all oppressed people, including Jews."

At best, these claims belie a deep ignorance of Jewish identities, peoplehood and history. At worst, they mask anti-Jewish ideas.

Regardless of intent, the impact of this resolution and the rhetoric surrounding it invites systemic isolation, exclusion, and dehumanization of Jewish voices and concerns in our schools. And while SPPS has a longstanding commitment to fostering safe and inclusive learning environments for all students and staff, the painful and insulting erasure of consensus Jewish concerns in the SPFE discourse reveals a critical gap in the protection and support for our Jewish community members.

Combating systemic antisemitism in our schools requires action from SPPS leadership.

To ensure that our schools remain places of safety, respect, and learning, we respectfully urge SPPS leadership to require training from Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas (JCRC, which is the consensus public affairs voice of the Jewish community) on Jewish Identity and Antisemitism for all staff members.

This initiative should aim to:

1. **Raise awareness** of the complexity of Jewish identity.

2. Increase understanding of the unique ways anti-Jewish language, symbols, and behaviors manifest, and their impact on individuals and communities.

3. Empower educators and staff to recognize and appropriately respond to incidents of antisemitism in classrooms, hallways, and online platforms

4. Foster inclusive practices that create a sense of belonging for Jewish students and staff, reinforcing their right to safety and respect within our schools.

5. Build stronger alliances between educators, parents, and community members to proactively combat hate and discrimination in all forms.

Every student and staff member deserves to feel safe and valued in our schools. By implementing training on Jewish identity and antisemitism, SPPS will reassure and protect its Jewish community members while setting a powerful example of leadership in combating bias against minority communities in public education. Let us take this necessary step to ensure that all members of our community can learn, teach, and grow without fear of discrimination or harm.

We urge you to consider this proposal with the seriousness and urgency it demands, and we respectfully request a meeting to discuss the training proposal.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response regarding a stakeholders meeting. And we look forward to seeing St. Paul Public Schools lead the way in fostering an environment where all individuals and communities are respected and supported.

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Comments from letter signers:

1. Antisemitism and a lack of understanding of Judaism and Jewish culture is a problem in our schools. Both of my children, as well as their friends have experienced antisemitism at school, as have Jewish staff in our schools. We wouldn't tolerate hate or discrimination of other minority groups; we need to take a stance that antisemitism is not ok and educate our community on this topic.
2. It is outrageous that my colleague has experienced antisemitism at work in an SPPS school and the union will not even respond.
3. Racism in any form does not belong in the school system. Education about cultural differences will help students understand how we are all more the same than we are different and our society is the better for it.
4. Please take action to stop this hate, it is growing at an alarming rate

5. My wife and I, recently moved to STP from Israel, withdrew our two Israeli kids from Horace Mann shortly after Oct 7 due to what we perceived as 'both sides-ism' on the part of the school administration, as well as obvious knowledge and awareness-based inadequacies needed to address our kids' identity as Jews and ours as Israeli parents. Our kids are now enrolled at HMJDS.
6. If my children were school age, I would remove them from SPPS.
7. The St. Paul Federation of Educators (which I was once part of), like CITY COUNCILS, have NO business weighing in on Israel/Palestinian issues. Its job is to represent teachers' issues, contracts, etc. SPFT needs to remain neutral if not staying out of this issue in order to ensure that all students can learn without worry of retribution or comments by educators that are inappropriate.
8. I am appalled that teachers of my kids describe Hamas as a "resistance organization." But such teachers simultaneously do not speak out in other world crisis like the Taliban or China's treatment of the Uyghurs. That, to me, is why this drips of antisemitism - this very single-minded focus on Israel.
9. Efforts at "diversity, equity and inclusion" consistently ignore the existence of Jews. SPPS- you should have EVERYONE at the table and acknowledge the hate that is now being promulgated in St. Paul by the SPFE.
10. Our children should NOT feel frightened, insecure, or worried about their religious identities based off of newly created resolution. The fact that this resolution could impact many children and is not supported by taxpayers and is agenda driven is worrisome. This disintegrates the atmosphere of a safe space for children. The resolution based off my reading is biased and clearly will be understood as agenda driven by children. Frankly, Oct. 7th should not be taught with some agenda and students shouldn't be taught that crimes are okay under some contexts.
11. Whitewashing Jewish history to fit a narrative that serves a political purpose is not only ignorant, but harmful. As a history major I am astonished at the lack of historical accuracy utilized in making educational decisions. In history, there is never a one-sided viewpoint, but yet every day I see educational institutions siding with one narrative and that narrative excludes the Jewish People from a land where they have always lived.
12. No child should feel they are experiencing antisemitism which can create fear in the child nor should a Jewish child or any child in the classroom not be included in any activity in the schools. It is up to the teachers to see that all children are treated fairly with no animosity toward who they are or what their religion may be. This is a teacher's full responsibility and

if they can't do this, they should not be in the classroom teaching children.

13. I was appalled when I first heard of the proposed resolution by the union and sent a concerned email to them. No one ever responded. It is unconscionable to me that the union that used to represent me and that I was actively engaged with would come out with such an antisemitic stance .
14. As a former employee of SPPS (for 11 yrs), it has always been a place that has been near and dear to my heart. It saddens me to know that SPPS is not showing up for our Jewish students and staff. My hope is that SPPS will hear and respect and take action in support of people who are Jewish.
15. When I was a student at CHS, my International Baccalaureate English teacher stood next to the Christmas tree in our classroom and told the entire class that “the Jews killed Jesus.” I spoke up, politely indicating that was not accurate. She told me, in front of everyone, that I was absolutely wrong. I was the only Jewish student in that classroom. I have never forgotten how simultaneously isolated and targeted I felt in that moment - and how unwelcome I felt in that classroom in perpetuity. I am deeply troubled to know that the St. Paul public schools continue to foster ignorance and bias in their approach to Jewish history.
16. I experienced antisemitism first-hand as a child in Soviet Union, we came to this country so our children and grandchildren never have to experience it. It pains me to see all the signs of antisemitism in our institutions that should be inclusive and free of double standards.
17. My SPPS student son and I are descendants of Holocaust survivors and we have family in Israel who escaped Poland (while most of our family were murdered in Poland). I am deeply dismayed and disgusted by any resolution adopted by teachers that seeks to whitewash mutilation, death, torture, rape, and evil by the terrorist organization Hamas. If a teacher cannot accurately understand and describe this antisemitic act of violence, I don't have faith that the teacher can be trusted to teach my child. My child deserves to be in a safe space. He is only here because his great-grandfather (Zayde) escaped Nazis.
18. Having PD on high holidays is extremely disrespectful of Jewish staff. Having to take unpaid time off when other districts just get it off for all teachers, staff and students to observe the holidays is what would show me you care about Jewish people.
19. I am a child of a family that secretly sheltered a Jewish refugee in WW2 occupied Denmark.
20. I am the daughter of Holocaust survivors, and this whole thing suggests that it is starting once again, never has there been such division since that time

21. I am the daughter of Holocaust survivors, my daughter works in your district, and she is the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, this is horrific
22. This is outrageous that St Paul public schools are promoting blatant Jew-hatred. My grandparents are all holocaust survivors who settled in St Paul after the holocaust.
23. This resolution has solidified my decision to not send my young Jewish children to SPPS.
24. Highland has always prided themselves on inclusivity and diversity. This single-handedly goes back on everything I was taught during my time there. The message that is being sent by supporting and spreading misinformation invalidates and excludes Jewish students.
25. The Teacher's Union resolution is abhorrent.
26. Everyone deserves to feel safe and have a comfortable learning environment in the SPPS.
27. I live in St. Paul and have witnessed the St. Paul City Council members completely ignore the voices of Jewish people in the city. Now the school district has an opportunity to redeem themselves by acknowledging the underlying antisemitism within the erasure of the October 7th attack on Israelis and the Jewish people by fostering dialogue through education.
28. I would hope my tax dollars to be used to teach all children that Israel and Jews deserve to exist and deserve protection.
29. I want to ensure that SPPS is a place where my daughter feels safe to express her Jewish identity as a minority in the district. That she learns how to have constructive, respectful dialogue on complex issues with people who may disagree with her. We can be critical of the Israeli government's response without being critical of Jews, and condemning the acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas. We can also talk about the FULL historical context of the creation of the state of Israel and why a Palestinian State was not accepted by the Arab governments in 1948, the historical existence of both Jews and Arabs in Israel and surrounding countries, and where other Arab states and countries have shown up (or more often not) to help create a functioning democracy in Gaza and the West Bank. This is a very complex and nuanced issue, and we need to all treat it as such.
30. Teach love and respect, not hate.
31. I have so appreciated the inclusive, multifaceted and multicultural community we have found at Randolph Heights and this resolution and the spirit behind it is entirely contrary and offensive to that community and the environment we want our children and our neighbors'

children to grow up in.

32. I believe that the initiative goals stated above can and should broadly address bias and religion/culture based prejudice.
33. I am disappointed in SPPS educators. St Paul has always welcomed its Jewish citizens.
34. It's only a matter of time before anti-Semitic speech and hate crimes emerge in SPPS unless leadership and government are proactive with accurate education and zero tolerance.
35. We, as Jewish students, were marginalized in the SPPS during my school days (1953-1966), but the situation is growing ever more dire. You MUST act on this -- decisively and immediately!
36. This is ignorance not education. Anyone who would put some minimal time looking into finding the TRUTH, will find out that this is all Hamas propaganda. All of the unions that signed this appalling letter against Israel are misinformed and downright ignorant or boldly anti semitic. It is time to scrap the department of education and start a new. Too many terrorists ideologies have infiltrated the space.
37. I am so sorry this is happening. As a Jew, I have experienced Muslim harassment at several places in Eagan. I wish this were not happening on our school system.
38. This divisive resolution does NOT provide accurate, historical information about the origins of HAMAS, a Terrorist Organization, that brutally slaughtered innocent, men, women and children on Oct. 7, 2023. While we wholeheartedly support any peaceful, factual dialogues around this subject, we cannot and must not allow the denial of the slaughter of innocents that started this new wave of horrible conflict in Gaza. We must protect Jewish students, staff and the community from horrible anti-semitic comments, sentiments and actions of some of these protestors nation-wide and within our own community here in St. Paul!
39. I am not Jewish, but I have taken training and read widely on both Jewish and Palestinian identity. Learning about the different identities in our communities is always worthwhile if we wish for all of our students to feel safe and welcome.
40. For the 12 years that my kids were in school I battled to make the district aware of the Jewish holidays and to make sure they were not scheduling exams or other important things on the High Holidays, Passover and Shavuot. I was mostly successful but had to have the same discussions every year.
41. No one at my building supported me when I asked people to attend the SPFE meeting. No one on FB of my past colleagues supported me. My co-teacher from the past 10 years has

not spoken to me about this issue since Oct 7 except to say- it affects her family also. I feel pretty alone as a Jewish educator and fake it much of the time as I build relationships with staff.

42. Don't let hate spread. Stop it now.

43. I have been a teacher with nonprofits highlighting the importance of inclusion for those with disabilities, different cultures, different religions, anti-racism, etc. I am one of the leaders who welcomed the Muslim children and parents into our schools. Let's not make the mistake of bringing war and hatred into our local.

We are a wonderful example of how to peacefully share our local land and resources. Let that be the way to teach our children. Let us be the role model to the rest of the world.

44. Please do the right thing! Our children deserve better!

45. I believe this training is vital to the well-being of our students and community. Teachers need the tools to be able to quickly address bullying, harassment, and micro-aggressions in the classrooms, cafeteria, and hallways. The Jewish perspective needs to be understood as part of the history of discrimination and racism in our country.

46. There is no reason for a war and act of terror on the other side of the planet cause a resolution to be passed within our school system. Especially a resolution that sides with terrorism and adds to the already growing antisemitism within our community. It in turn makes me question the education of the SPPS staff to make such a resolution and further makes me question whether myself as an SPPS vendor will be treated fairly and whether or not my child will be safe attending an SPPS school.

47. This resolution is outrageous. Having made progress teaching about the history of American Indians and African Americans, this is a huge step backwards. All students and employees deserve to feel and be safe. Many Jewish people want an end to the violence in the Middle East, an area, by the way which inhabited by the Hebrews 400 years before Islam was established.

48. Everyone deserves to feel safe in our public institutions.

49. This is not an issue in which the St. Paul Federation should be involved. Their focus should be on the needs of St. Paul students.

50. All students and teachers deserve to feel safe in and outside of their schools.

51. I don't think SPFE should be getting involved in this situation. They don't understand the full history of the history and conflict. This resolution could be harmful to our Jewish students.
52. We are overdue to guarantee the safety and comfort of all our students in St. Paul and everywhere else!
53. This is unacceptable.
54. Stop the shallow hatred, please.
55. It has been hard to be a Jewish teacher in Saint Paul. Finally having High Holy Days off felt wonderful - until I realized it was an inservice day. This year, that meant that I had to use a sick day AND ALSO make up the work on my own time, completing the CAREIALL trainings on a different day. It felt horrible a few years ago - 2021? - to receive district communication (as a staff and I believe also as a parent) that, because of Rosh Hashanah there would be no snow days. The district communication was not quite this blunt, but the implication was clear and strong. As one of 2 Jewish adults (my children the only Jewish students) at my school, I felt publicly shamed, like it was my family's fault that no one got snow days. I love seeing how others celebrate and live - but the sheer volume of Christmas (and Easter) activities that my children had to experience, and that I witness every year, is also a harsh reminder of how much we DO NOT belong.
56. When did it become acceptable, even fashionable, to makes excuses for (and even openly support) Jew-haters and terrorists? Sickening. I harbor to guess that the union does not represent the majority of its members in its resolution.
57. I am Jewish mother who would like to see a more knowledgeable public.
58. Growing up I didn't tell others I was Jewish because I never felt it was safe enough.
59. I was proud to be a member of SPPS, where I could hang an "All are welcome here" sign on my classroom door, along with a safe space sticker. I am so disheartened that SPFE has passed this resolution, instead of taking a stance that supports peace and safety for all. As a Jew, it is absolutely devastating.
60. I emigrated from the country (former Soviet Union, USSR) where antisemitism was supported by the Government, and I know very well that countries infected with antisemitism have no sources for progressive and economic development.

61. Jewish students, staff and community members deserve the same protections as all the other groups we subscribe to respecting within our schools.
62. Stop the hate.
63. My daughter is one of the only Jewish students at her Spanish-immersion school. She has been told by classmates she is going to hell. These kids need explicit and inclusive education about Jewish identity and antisemitic interventions.
64. The term "resistance" has been associated with the good, deserving underdog. What Hamas did and continues to do by not releasing hostages and forcing Palestinian civilians to be collateral damage needs to be called for what it is: ruthless terrorism. If we are not willing to do that, then avoid the topic altogether and focus resolutions on educator-related issues.
65. This resolution displays an appalling level of ignorance and an epic rewriting of history. The war in Gaza is tragic. No one is arguing otherwise. But this kind of resolution makes American Jews scapegoats for the violence occurring in the Middle East. Not only that, this resolution is absolutely outside of the union's responsibilities. Where are the resolutions about other wars in the world? Why does a teacher's union 6,000 miles from Israel need to take a stand on this issue? And, most important, what does such a resolution actually do for the people of Gaza? Our Jewish community deserves better and so do our students, who now must wonder if their teachers supported this antisemitic resolution. I suggest SPFE teachers educate themselves on the Middle East and leave the international politics out of their union.
66. It is shameful that educators refuse to acknowledge historical facts of Jewish land and oppression of Jews, calling terrorists/killers a "resistance movement"
67. It seems like your knowledge of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism is coming from extremist sources posing as mainstream or inclusive. They are clearly not if these are the kinds of resolutions being passed.
68. Unbelievable how I cannot think of sending my children to the schools now, despite being an alum because I am terrified for antisemitism
69. As an educator I am horrified.
70. Withdraw the resolution that erased Jewish experiences and promoted the terrorist organization Hamas' narrative describing the October 7, 2023, invasion of Israel as "multiple resistance organizations in Gaza revolt[ing] against Israel."

71. We have already been considering moving to a different district due to concerns about this issue and the recent events have reinforced that concern
72. Israel was attacked on October 7 without cause or reason with the loss of over 1000 lives. Jews now in St Paul no longer feel as safe as before. This shouldn't be happening in 2024.
73. I am Jewish, a Grandma, and feel strongly about antisemitism. My grandparents were killed in a concentration camp. My grandson is looking for appropriate Middle School. Thank you!
74. SPPS should value and celebrate all students and give students and staff of all backgrounds their most important holidays off.
75. Do the right thing. Please.
76. I am not Jewish and I am saddened by the tragedies that have occurred and will continue to occur especially in the that region of the world. If it is the desire of SPPS to provide a safe environment for ALL of their students, I hope they will heed the concerns of the Jewish leaders and make space for this reasonable request.
77. Do better SPPS. You can hold and attend to the complex experience of Jewish students.
78. In my past experience with the SPPS I have participated in cultural awareness and sensitivity training specific to incoming refugee communities and I believe sensitivity training and cultural awareness about Jewish inclusion is absolutely something that must be required for all staff.
79. My Jewish friends, family and neighbors need to feel safe and supported.
80. The SPFE resolution is out of line and it is inappropriate for them to take a political position. It does not show respect for the diverse opinions and feelings of the school community. It invites hate, discrimination and polarization.
81. I simply believe that more needs to be done to raise awareness and increase understanding of Jewish individuals and communities to prevent discrimination and harm.
82. The school district MUST address this evil encroachment of antisemitism with the same intensity as if we were dealing with any other racism or issues of gender. Staff who offer their personal views need to be educated on an inclusive education for all students.

83. I wish to affirm that I am not signing this letter in defense of the Israeli government's response to the October 7 attack. I am signing because the wording of your statement obviates the need for any Jewish perspective.
84. I'm a psychologist, alum of Talmud Torah, and a current SPPS taxpayer. Deeply concerned about antisemitism. I co-facilitate a Jewish support group now.
85. It has become painfully obvious that Jewish identity, culture and concerns are not included in SPPS inclusion efforts. This must change. As a professional who has worked with SPPS in a number of capacities over many years, I am deeply concerned by the precedent they are setting. As a Jewish person, I am sad to say I would not feel safe sending my children to any SPPS school at this point (if I had school-age children).
86. SPPS has a history of ignoring any and all opposition to their neo-Maoist/racial Marxist agenda for the schools and their indoctrination of our children as illustrated by the recent spate of school re-namings for no good reason other than historic revisionism based on purported victimhood. I am not represented by the autocratic school board while they keep taking more and more of my money. Part of their neo-Nazi/Islamist-inspired agenda is to portray Jews as "imposters" and 'white colonists' and to perpetuate the lie of "Israeli genocide against Gazans". It must be stopped by more than letters and meetings. They need to be defunded and reorganized. We need school choice.
87. I called the union a number of times last year expressing my concerns about their rhetoric.
88. The SPPS, through this resolution, is effectively marginalizing and isolating students, teachers, and staff who belong to St. Paul's Jewish community. What does this Resolution have to do with educating St. Paul's children? Why is SPPS involving itself in the Middle East conflict? As individuals, we are certainly entitled to our opinions and to express our interests. But it is perplexing why the SPPS chose to involve itself, as an organization, in this particular conflict.

Where were the SPPS Resolutions denouncing the killing of some 600,000 Muslims during the Syrian civil war, the (actual) ongoing genocide perpetrated in the Darfur region of Sudan, or the ongoing direct and well-documented persecution of the Uighur people, also Muslim, by China? The SPPS stayed silent through many other global atrocities until Israel, the sole Jewish state, dared to defend itself against a brutal attack targeting its people, to whom the St. Paul Jewish community have a deep connection.

I attended SPPS from kindergarten through high school, where I was taught liberal, Western, values of tolerance, respect for diversity of thought, and the importance of protecting the

rights of minorities and seeking unity in our community. The Resolution shamelessly and grotesquely flies in the face of all of these values. This leads me to wonder how (and what) students are actually being taught by SPPS today.

I urge SPPS leadership to take a long and sincere look at their treatment of their Jewish students, teachers, staff, and members of the St. Paul Jewish Community.

89. I have been deeply shocked at the recent eruption of anti-Jewish sentiments.

90. I have served in varied nonprofits with varied missions to improve access, inclusion, cultural protection, native language preservation, mainstream historical corrections, etc. I now serve a Jewish Educational nonprofit and I am stunned by the overt challenges in educational systems around protecting, supporting and celebrating this culture and heritage. St Paul's history was clearly enhanced by the efforts and contributions of the Jewish community. Racism, bigotry, discrimination, exclusion, violence, targeting are easily visible in St Paul since the first Jewish immigrants arrived. Why is this group not afforded the same care, compassion, attention as other minority groups for whom protections, narrative changes and reparations need to be made? My lens does not seek to cease the community consciousness offered to any disadvantaged/non-dominant group. I am fully supportive of the progress being made for the rainbow of folks who call this city their home. Why does this progress stop with the Jews? Why? I plead with you to consider this. I speak not as a member of the Jewish race/religion but as an ally who is committed to advocacy for leveling the playing field for all of our residents, and our youth especially. I speak as a mother of six who learned and grew in this district. I speak as a grandmother of a child of color who sees the opportunity for the next generation to get a better understanding of history and the impact of inequality. I speak as a taxpayer and supporter of public education. I speak as the mother of a Muslim convert and a Palestinian refugee son-in-law. I speak as a child of peace corps workers with a mother who committed her teaching career to a historically black college. I speak as a person who was born on the continent of Africa. I speak as a community activist committed to the promise that Minnesota can offer to those who may not find safe harbor in other states. I speak as a human who wants kids to feel safe, valued, included, understood. I speak as a woman who knows what it is like to be vulnerable. No student should be afraid to share who they are. No student should feel shame about their background. No student should experience their heritage misrepresented in the public sphere. Let us do better than our grandparents. Let us navigate current trends grounded in facts and context. Let us use our privilege for good. Do better. I know that you can!

91. I am both appalled and terrified that children are being inculcated with the SPPS's board overt racism. They are trying to teach children that terrorism and mass murder of civilians is the best and only way to resolve disputes. Hamas has always denied the right of Jews to live in the Middle East. The school board apparently agrees despite the Middle Eastern origin of

the religion. I suggest the board and all elected officials read the hate filled Hamas Charter. They are not exempt

92. One of my good friends/colleagues is Jewish and I see every day how this hurts her
93. This letter is despicable and has many inaccurate factual statements. It is far from being something coming from school educators. It is biased and shameful; so one sided including not acknowledging the horrific acts of Hamas which necessitated the need to eliminate this terror organization; tying Lebanon together with Gaza also is one example of ignorance being expressed by so called educators. I could go on and on and will if you need more examples.
94. It is very difficult for my daughter to be Jewish at SPPS. She is afraid to share this with her friends.
95. If you want to advocate against Israel, feel free to do it. But keep the union and St. Paul stakeholders (of all varieties) out of it. Schools should create goodwill, not antagonism. And please educate yourselves on the complex issues.
96. Our schools need to be a safe place for every student, hate does not belong in SPPS.