

Robert Brym

**A Survey on Antisemitism
in Ontario's K-12 Schools**

For Sophie, Molly, Andie, Max, and Sadie

מיינע יוצא-דופֿנדיקע אייניקלעך

לעתיך טוב יותר

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Toronto

Abstract

This study demonstrates the existence of a disjuncture between the purported desire of Ontario schools to ensure that all students feel respected, included, and valued; and the treatment of their Jewish students. Its main source of information is a survey of 599 Jewish parents and their reports on 781 antisemitic incidents in Ontario K–12 schools. Antisemitic incidents are defined as those that parents and their children consider antisemitic. The 781 incidents reported here were directly experienced by an estimated 10 percent of Ontario's approximately thirty thousand Jewish school-age children. The survey was in the field from late January to early April 2025. It covers incidents that took place in the sixteen months (thirteen school months) from October 2023 to January 2025. The survey sample is roughly representative of the two-thirds of Ontario Jews most closely tied to the Jewish community by membership in synagogues or other Jewish organizations.

Key findings of the survey include the following:

- More than 40 percent of antisemitic incidents involved Nazi salutes, assertions that Hitler should have finished the job, and the like. Fewer than 60 percent of antisemitic incidents referred to Israel or the Israel–Hamas war.
- Nearly one in six antisemitic incidents were initiated or approved by a teacher or involved a school-sanctioned activity.
- Just over two-thirds of antisemitic incidents occurred in English public schools and nearly one-fifth took place in Jewish private schools. Fourteen percent of incidents occurred in French, Catholic, and non-Jewish private schools.
- Nearly three-quarters of antisemitic incidents took place in the Toronto District School Board, the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board, and the York Region District School Board.
- The most common emotional reactions to antisemitic incidents on the part of their victims involved anger (31 percent), fear of returning to school or of being bullied (nearly 27 percent), and worrying about losing non-Jewish friends and being socially isolated (more than 27 percent).
- Some children insisted that their parents not report an antisemitic incident, fearing it would become public, and they would consequently become the target of increased harassment or bullying. Some removed clothing and jewelry with Jewish symbols and Hebrew lettering so they would not be identified as Jewish.
- Forty-nine percent of antisemitic incidents reported to school authorities were not investigated. In another nearly 9 percent of cases, school authorities denied the incident was antisemitic or recommended that the *victim* be removed from the school permanently or attend school virtually.

- In under one-third of cases reported to school authorities, schools responded by providing counselling for the targeted child or the perpetrator, taking punitive action against the perpetrator, creating or modifying a program to promote ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance of Jews, or reporting the incident to the police.
- Because of antisemitic incidents experienced by their children, 16 percent of parents moved their children to another school or are considering doing so. Some relocated residences to enrol their children in different schools.
- A Jewish private school is the choice of 39 percent of parents who moved their children to another school or are considering doing so.

Résumé

Cette étude démontre l'existence d'une disjonction entre le prétendu désir des écoles de l'Ontario de s'assurer que tous les élèves se sentent respectés, inclus et valorisés ; et le traitement de leurs élèves juifs. Sa principale source d'information est un sondage auprès de 599 parents juifs et leurs déclarations au sujet des 781 incidents antisémites dans les écoles primaires et secondaires de l'Ontario. Les incidents antisémites sont définis comme ceux que les parents et leurs enfants considèrent comme antisémites. Les 781 incidents signalés ici ont été vécus directement par environ 10 pour cent des quelque trente mille enfants juifs d'âge scolaire de l'Ontario. L'enquête s'est déroulée sur le terrain de fin janvier à début avril 2025. Il couvre les incidents survenus au cours des seize mois (treize mois scolaires) d'octobre 2023 à janvier 2025. L'échantillon de l'enquête est à peu près représentatif des deux tiers des personnes juives de l'Ontario les plus étroitement liées à la communauté juive par leur appartenance à des synagogues ou à d'autres organisations juives.

Les résultats essentiels de la nouvelle enquête sont les suivants :

- Plus de 40 % des incidents antisémites impliquaient des salutations nazies, des affirmations selon lesquelles Hitler aurait dû finir le travail, et ainsi de suite. Moins de 60 % des incidents antisémites concernaient Israël ou la guerre Israël-Hamas.
- Près d'un incident antisémite sur six a été initié ou approuvé par un enseignant ou impliquait une activité sanctionnée par l'école.
- Un peu plus des deux tiers des incidents antisémites se sont produits dans les écoles publiques anglaises et près d'un cinquième dans les écoles privées juives. Quatorze pour cent des incidents se sont produits dans des écoles privées françaises, catholiques et non juives.
- Près des trois quarts des incidents antisémites ont lieu dans les conseils scolaires des districts de Toronto, de Ottawa-Carleton et de la région de York.
- Les réactions émotionnelles les plus courantes parmi les victimes des incidents antisémites étaient la colère (31 %), la peur de retourner à l'école ou d'être victime d'intimidation (près de 27 %) et l'inquiétude de perdre des amis non juifs et d'être socialement isolés (plus de 27 %).
- Certains enfants ont insisté pour que leurs parents ne signalent pas un incident antisémite, craignant qu'il ne devienne public et qu'ils ne deviennent par conséquent la cible d'un harcèlement ou d'une intimidation accrue. Certains ont enlevé des vêtements et des bijoux avec des symboles juifs et des lettres hébraïques afin qu'ils ne soient pas identifiés comme juifs et juives.

- Quarante-neuf pour cent des incidents antisémites signalés aux autorités scolaires n'ont pas fait l'objet d'une enquête. Dans près de 9 % des cas, les autorités scolaires ont nié que l'incident était antisémite ou ont recommandé que la *victime* soit retirée de l'école de façon permanente ou qu'elle fréquente l'école virtuellement.
- Dans moins d'un tiers des cas signalés aux autorités scolaires, les écoles ont réagi en fournissant des conseils à l'enfant ciblé ou à l'agresseur ; en prenant des mesures punitives contre l'agresseur ; en créant ou en modifiant un programme visant à promouvoir la tolérance ethnique, raciale et religieuse des Juifs ; ou en signalant l'incident à la police.
- En raison d'incidents antisémites vécus par leurs enfants, 16 % des parents ont inscrit leurs enfants dans une autre école ou envisagent de le faire. Certains ont déménagé de résidence pour inscrire leurs enfants dans une autre école.
- 39 % des parents qui ont transféré leurs enfants dans une autre école ou qui envisagent de le faire choisissent une école privée juive.

I

**Two Views of Antisemitism
in Ontario's K–12 Schools**

Schools should be safe and welcoming places where all students and staff feel respected, included, and valued in their learning and working environments.

—Toronto District School Board¹

The problem with antisemitism in education isn't that no one is speaking up, it's that schools aren't listening.

—Talía Freedhoff, a grade 12 Jewish student²

1.1 The Official View

Is Talía Freedhoff exaggerating? It would seem so if we base our judgment on data published by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Conditions vary from one part of the province to another and from school to school. However, the TDSB is Ontario's largest school board, serving 12 percent of Ontario's K–12 students, including 31% of Ontario's approximately thirty thousand Jewish children of school age.³ It is therefore worth examining in detail what the TDSB has to say about the frequency of antisemitic incidents in its schools.

In the 2023–24 school year, the TDSB's racism, bias, and hate online portal logged 2,155 incidents, 312 of which (14.5 percent) involved antisemitism.⁴ Since about 9,300 of the TDSB's students are Jewish, this means that one of every thirty Jewish students faced antisemitism in 2023–24.

An unknown but minuscule number of such incidents are dealt with by suspension or expulsion of offending students. The last year for which relevant data are available as of this writing is 2022–23. Just 3 percent of suspensions in that school year were due to actions “motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or any other similar factor.” Grounds for suspension and expulsion include “hate-motivated occurrences” and “distribution of hate material.”⁵ Regrettably, the TDSB does not report whether any suspensions were due to antisemitism. It may nonetheless be relevant that the number of suspensions in TDSB schools declined 11 percent between 2018–19 and 2022–23, while the number of expulsions dropped 53 percent. Moreover, in 2022–23, only 28 percent of students recommended for expulsion saw the recommendation upheld after appeal. The comparable figure for students recommended for suspension was just 14 percent. These numbers suggest that rule minding is increasingly normative and rule breaking increasingly exceptional in TDSB schools, while antisemitism rarely results in suspension or expulsion of offending students.

There are four issues with the Board's data on antisemitism. First, the TDSB codes antisemitism narrowly as a form of *religious* hatred. Yet Jews are not just a religious group. According to the Census of Canada and customary research practice, Jews may say they have no religion yet define themselves as Jewish by ethnicity, culture, or ancestry.⁶ In the 2021 Census of Canada, such Jews formed 11 percent of metro Toronto's Jewish population and represent by far the fastest growing segment of Canadian Jewry.⁷ However, since the TDSB does not count such individuals as Jews, they apparently do not contribute to the tally of antisemitic incidents even if they experience antisemitism.

Second, the TDSB's tally of antisemitic incidents fails to take into account that, in 2018, the TDSB adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The IHRA defines as antisemitic all rhetoric and action denying the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. Such rhetoric and action is widespread in schools, yet the TDSB evidently fails to count it as antisemitic.⁸

Third, as I show later, many antisemitic incidents are not reported because Jewish students fear re-victimization, ostracism, and physical retribution. Relatedly, some Jewish students may anticipate that reporting an incident isn't worth the effort because nothing (or nothing meaningful) will be done about it.

Finally, most antisemitic incidents that are reported to a teacher or a principal are dealt with at the school level if they are dealt with at all. They are not reported to the school board unless they reach a certain level of seriousness as judged by the principal. Certain criteria may be used to decide whether an incident is serious enough to be reported but, if these criteria exist, they have evidently not been publicized. And in any case, the principal undoubtedly has much discretionary power regarding whether to report.

For all these reasons, I have no doubt that the antisemitic incidents recorded by the TDSB are only a fraction of the total.

After several hundred Jewish parents staged a demonstration outside the TDSB head office on June 18, 2024, hope emerged that enforcement of preventative and punitive actions, and data accuracy regarding antisemitic incidents, might improve. Inside, Board trustees were discussing a new anti-racism policy. The parents were objecting to the TDSB ignoring evidence of mounting antisemitism in its 582 schools.

As a result of the demonstration, the Board consulted 125 Jewish students and thirty-five Jewish community groups in the following months. Based on these consultations, it issued a report titled *Affirming Jewish Identities and Addressing Antisemitism*.⁹ Among thirty-two recommendations, the report suggested recognizing anti-Zi-

onism as a form of antisemitism. After a long and contentious meeting in February 2025, the trustees agreed to receive the report. They then passed a motion to consolidate a whole series of Board anti-hate policies—a process that is expected to take three years or longer with unforeseeable results.¹⁰ As such, one may expect the persistence of the status quo indefinitely.

The TDSB story is not unique. Ottawa is home to approximately 1,700 Jewish children of school age.¹¹ The response of the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) to abundant evidence of growing antisemitism amassed by Jewish parents has failed to address the immediate need to protect Jewish students from harassment, bullying, threats, and physical assault. Some Jewish parents have gone so far as to relocate their residences to areas of Ottawa serviced by safer schools or transfer their children to safer schools within the OCDSB or the Ottawa Catholic School Board.¹²

1.2 News Stories

News reports also suggest that antisemitism is a bigger problem than Ontario's school boards recognize. As a crude estimate of the growth of the problem, I turned to the largest circulation daily newspapers in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and London: Ontario's four largest Jewish communities, accounting for 91 percent of Ontario's Jewish population. For each of the *Toronto Star*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Hamilton Spectator*, and the *London Free Press*, I counted the number of stories per year that include the words “antisemitism,” “school,” and the name of the city. Some people consider the *Toronto Star* as unsympathetic to Jewish issues as Toronto's *National Post* is sympathetic, so, in the case of Toronto, I counted stories from both these newspapers and divided the total by two. Table 1 displays the results of this exercise.¹³

Between 2022 and 2024, there was a 374 percent increase across the four cities in the number of news stories that include all three search terms. Hamilton experienced by far the greatest percentage increase in the number of such stories over the three-year period (444 percent), London the smallest (150 percent). The absolute number of stories in London was also exceptionally low.

The larger the city, its Jewish population, and the percentage of Jews in the city, the larger the number of stories. However, a better indicator of the intensity with which Jewish students experience antisemitism in schools is the number of stories per 1,000 Jews in the city. Again, Hamilton leads, with 17.5 stories per 1,000 Jews between 2022 and 2024. Ottawa is the distant runner-up at 6.8 stories per 1,000 Jews, with Toronto placing last among the four cities at 1.3 stories per 1,000 Jews.

Table 1 Frequency of news stories about antisemitism in K–12 schools, four largest Jewish communities in Ontario, 2022–24									
Census Metropolitan Area	Population	Jewish population*	% Jews	Frequency of stories			Total stories	% increase in stories	Total stories/ 1,000 Jews
	2021	2021	2021	2022	2023	2024	2022–24	2022–24	2022–24
Toronto	6,202,225	186,905	3.0	24	76	141	241	488	1.3
Ottawa**	1,135,014	14,045	1.2	15	39	42	96	180	6.8
Hamilton	785,184	5,310	0.7	9	35	49	93	444	17.5
London	543,551	2,765	0.5	2	3	5	10	150	3.6
Total news stories				50	153	237	440		
Total percent increase								374	
*Jews are here defined as individuals who identify as Jews by religion plus individuals who say they have no religion but identify as Jewish by ethnicity, culture or ancestry. **Includes only the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau census metropolitan area. Sources: Charles Shahrar, <i>2021 Census: The Jewish Population of Canada Jewish</i> (Jewish Federations of Canada-UIA and CIJA, 2024), 58; Statistics Canada, <i>Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Profile Table</i> , Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001 (Statistics Canada, November 15, 2023), https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Toronto&D-GUIDlist=2021S0503535&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0 ; <i>Toronto Star</i> , <i>National Post</i> , <i>Ottawa Citizen</i> , <i>Hamilton Spectator</i> , <i>London Free Press</i> (2022–24).									

Antisemitic incidents must reach a certain level of gravity to make the news. Unlikely to be reported are many “minor” incidents, such as Jewish students finding swastikas scrawled on their desks; being forced by their classmates to declare whether they support Israel or Palestine (as if the choice is binary); or confronting in school hallways a Nazi salute or an inverted red triangle (used by Hamas to mark targets). The part of the iceberg lying beneath the surface is larger than the news stories enumerated in Table 1 make it seem. I designed the survey on which this report is based to draw a sketch of the iceberg’s depth and contours.

2

The Survey

Counts of newspapers stories on antisemitic incidents should not lead one to conclude that antisemitism is the norm in Ontario's K–12 schools. Many schools in the province are free of antisemitism, many virtually so. Some school authorities recognize antisemitic incidents as such, handling them promptly and responsibly when they occur. Nonetheless, one cannot reasonably doubt that antisemitism is a growing problem and that incidents are typically undercounted, often ignored, and sometimes abetted by teachers, principals, and school board trustees. This report demonstrates as much for the TDSB, the OCDSB, and other school boards in the province. It is based on a survey of parents of Jewish children who are enrolled in Ontario's K–12 schools.

To gain a more accurate picture of antisemitism in Ontario's K–12 schools than is otherwise available, I turned to the office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism. I proposed conducting a survey allowing me to test whether documents like the TDSB's *Caring and Safe Schools Report, 2022–2023* and *Human Rights Office Annual Report 2023–24* provide an accurate picture of antisemitism in Ontario's K–12 schools. Thankfully, though unsurprisingly, the Special Envoy, Deborah Lyons, saw the value in what I proposed.

To recruit parents for the survey, I first composed a list of 257 Jewish organizations in Ontario—synagogues, summer camps, day schools, part-time schools, early childhood education programs, youth groups, and so on—and the email addresses of their heads. In late January 2025, I sent the heads of these organizations an email in which they were told that the survey would go live at the beginning of February. They were also asked to distribute a second email a few days later to all members of their organizations. The second email (the text of which I prepared) contained information about the survey and explained how parents with children in the province's K–12 schools could answer the survey questionnaire online.

Follow-up emails and phone calls encouraged responses from various Jewish institutions and communities. Ads about the survey were placed in the *Canadian Jewish News*, the main source of news about Canada's Jewish community. The survey, available online in English and French until early April, elicited 599 reports on 781 antisemitic incidents.¹⁴ These 781 incidents took place between October 2023 and January 2025 inclusive and were directly experienced by at least 10 percent of Ontario's roughly thirty thousand Jewish school-age children. This percentage is based on my observation that many of the incidents occurred as Jewish students walked home together, clustered in school hallways, congregated in schoolyards, sat in classrooms with other Jewish students, attended school assemblies along with the rest of their school's Jewish population, and had to be evacuated from schools because of bomb threats.¹⁵ The incident reports form the quantitative basis for this study. In addition, fourteen respondents participated in approximately thirty-five-minute semi-structured interviews. The interviews add depth and colour to the quantitative material.

It became evident in the course of the research that, despite assurances to the contrary, some parents worry that information they supply might be traceable back to them, with unknown consequences for their privacy and safety—and the privacy and safety of their children. It also emerged that many children are reluctant to tell their parents about antisemitic incidents they experience. They believe their parents will go to school authorities, some of whom will take action against the aggressor. The incident is then likely to become common knowledge in the student population and lead to the child being ostracized, harassed, or physically assaulted.¹⁶ In short, the high level of anxiety in Ontario's Jewish community depressed the total number of incident reports available for this survey.

The survey is based on a non-probability sample of Jewish adults in Ontario. I believe it roughly reflects the characteristics of the approximately two-thirds of Ontario's Jewish adults who are relatively well connected to the province's Jewish community insofar as they are members of a synagogue or other Jewish organization (see the Appendix for details). As earlier research shows, such people are likely to identify relatively strongly as Jews and to be relatively emotionally attached to Israel.¹⁷

I do not have sufficient confidence in the representativeness of the sample to apply tests of statistical significance to the findings. I do consider the sample adequate for providing tentative answers to a series of questions that reflect the experience of about two-thirds of Ontario's Jews. Specifically:

1. How does the count of antisemitic incidents vary over time and across school boards and type of school (English public, French public, English Catholic, French Catholic, private non-Jewish, and private Jewish)?
2. As a result of their children experiencing antisemitic incidents, how frequently do Jewish parents decide to move their children to schools governed by different school boards? What types of school boards are most prone to Jewish out-migration and what types are most likely to experience Jewish in-migration?
3. What exactly occurred during the reported antisemitic incidents? What is it about the reported incidents that makes them antisemitic in the eyes of parents and students?
4. How do Jewish children respond to the antisemitic incidents they experience in school? How often do they laugh off the incident, grow angry, become fearful, refuse to return to school, worry about losing friends, feel isolated, report the incident, or take action to combat antisemitism?
5. How often do parents report antisemitic incidents to school authorities? What, if anything, do schools do about such reports? If they do anything, how long does it take schools to respond?

6. What policy initiatives might help to mitigate the spread of antisemitism in Ontario's K–12 schools?

As the first systematic study of antisemitism in Ontario's K–12 schools, this report presents a unique set of answers to the foregoing questions. However, like first studies in any field, much additional research is required to improve on the initial foray. Above all, future inquiries need to adopt a method of including the approximately one-third of Ontario's Jewish community members who are underrepresented in this study: parents who do not belong to Jewish organizations and/or whose self-identification as Jews is likely weaker than that of respondents in the present sample. Snowball sampling is a cost-effective method of reaching such people. It involves asking members of the core sample to recommend underrepresented individuals for the study. In turn, the latter recommend still more underrepresented individuals, creating a "snowball" effect.

Including reports of antisemitic incidents directly from older schoolchildren is also likely to improve our understanding of the problem of antisemitism in Ontario's K–12 schools. Such an undertaking would require face-to-face interviews. One would have to tread gently since discussing antisemitic incidents with victims can re-traumatize them. Parents would have to grant permission for their children to participate in such a study, and they would likely want to be present during the interviews.

Some multivariate analysis may be possible using this study's data. However, additional research is needed to collect data on variables not included here: social characteristics of victims, their families, offenders, schools, and even the communities in which schools are embedded. Such data would make it possible to conduct multivariate and multi-level analyses that would add analytical depth to the largely descriptive presentation that follows.

These suggestions for future research point to the limitations of the current study. But shortcomings notwithstanding, the data and analysis proffered in this report constitute an important supplement (perhaps "antidote" is a more accurate term) to documents like the TDSB's *Human Rights Office Annual Report 2023–24*. Hopefully it will spur discussion and debate, helping to move us one step closer to adoption of the TDSB's *Affirming Jewish Identities and Addressing Antisemitism* report and similar initiatives in other Ontario school boards.¹⁸

3

Social Forces Facilitating Hate

Recent research identifies a host of factors in families, schools, and the larger society that facilitate the expression of hate in schools.¹⁹ In this section, I itemize and illustrate seven such factors that likely operate in the case at hand.

A social environment that promotes antagonism is one of the main forces eliciting expressions of hate in schools. In the present case, violent Israeli military engagements with Palestinians are associated with increased expression of hate against Jews in diaspora countries. The greater the duration and destruction of a military engagement, the more numerous the hate incidents.²⁰

By way of illustration, compare the effects of (1) the 2021 “Guardian of the Walls” campaign, which killed 236 Palestinians over twelve days and (2) the only Israeli military operation in 2022, which lasted three days and killed thirty-eight Palestinians. With less violence against Palestinians in 2022, the number of antisemitic incidents reported in B’nai Brith Canada’s annual audit dropped by two-thirds between 2021 and 2022.²¹ Another cycle of hate began immediately following October 7, 2023, when Israel’s “Swords of Iron” campaign, aimed at eliminating Hamas, began. Palestinian casualties reached an unprecedented level, numbering in the tens of thousands, with a much larger number of civilian casualties than in previous campaigns.²² Hate crimes soon spiked in Canadian cities, and expressions of antisemitism in Ontario’s K–12 schools reached what many Jewish parents saw as crisis proportions.²³

A second factor facilitating hateful incidents in schools is *weak prosocial modelling in the family*. According to an old Yiddish saying, *vos alte shpayen, yinge kayen*—what elders spit out, youngsters chew. Child psychologists say the same thing, albeit more delicately. Children typically model their behaviour after the behaviour of their parents, so if parents are hostile toward certain groups, their children tend to follow suit.²⁴

The reverse is also true. Recent survey research shows that 87 percent of Canadian adults, including 48 percent of Canadian Muslim adults, have at least somewhat positive attitudes toward Jews.²⁵ The way they raise their children influences the way their children interact with Jewish schoolmates. As one of the survey respondents said about her twelve-year-old son:

He has friends from different backgrounds. He has Muslim friends. He has Palestinian friends. They get along well. I asked if they discuss anything about the conflict in the Middle East, about religion, and he said no. They accept his customs, what he follows, he accepts theirs. They treat each other well, and it matters a lot.

On the other hand, 13 percent of Canadian adults with an opinion on the subject, including 52 percent of Canadian Muslim adults, have at least somewhat negative attitudes toward Jews. When the parents among them express negative attitudes

toward Jews at home, their children tend to learn to dislike Jews, as the following case illustrates.

A survey participant from a city east of Toronto reported that, in January 2025, her eight-year-old daughter returned home from school one day, upset about an anecdote a schoolmate related as factual, based on what her schoolmate's parents told her:

One day a Jewish family knocked on the door of a Palestinian family and said, "Can we come in?" The Palestinian family welcomed the Jewish family into their home. Then another Jewish family asked another Palestinian family, and over and over again the Palestinians welcomed them, but when the Jewish families got into each house they pushed out the Palestinian families who answered the door. The Jewish people were stealing their homes.

With respect to Jews, *antisocial* modelling is evident in this family, with likely consequences.

Insufficient social control is a third factor increasing the frequency of antisemitic incidents in schools. Again, first consider the reverse.

An Ottawa mother with two boys in French primary school related a heartening story. She shared that about 95 percent of students in the school are Muslim. Fewer than five (not 5 percent) are Jews. Although challenges exist, the school board has mostly been supportive and responsive in ensuring the safety of Jewish children since October 7, 2023. A couple of children in the school experienced antisemitic incidents, but her own children have been largely spared. The mother described the school's annual multicultural evening when parents prepare dishes typical of their country of origin, with the flag of their country of origin displayed beside the food. An Israeli by origin, the mother served shakshuka and challah. Many teachers, parents, and children came by to sample the food and compliment it. "It was a moment of mutual connection, shared meaning and relationship building," she claimed. A Muslim parent commented about the joy he felt seeing first- and second-generation Canadian children from across the Middle East playing together without the burden of war. "This is the essence of Canada," he said.

Idyllic schools like this one are far from universal. Lack of social control over antisemitic incidents is evident in many Ontario schools. For example, about a month after the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, on Remembrance Day, an Ottawa teacher in an English public school was instructing her students on the Holocaust. Thoughtlessly (or perhaps suspecting the likely effect of her action), she disseminated only antisemitic Nazi propaganda to the class. Some students apparently understood the propaganda to be an accurate characterization of Jews. According to the parent,

this inflamed an already tense situation. There were those in the class, Muslim or not, who made comments, gestures, and left notes that were inflammatory and derogatory to the Jewish students. There were confrontations in the hallways by several pro-Palestinian students.

Neither the teacher nor the antisemitic students faced any consequences for their actions.

At another school, according to a second parent, the 2023 Remembrance Day assembly treated the student body to

a pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli song. It had absolutely nothing to do with Remembrance Day.... My son was so upset that the next day he wrote to the principal and both vice-principals and said ... when school started in September, you said in the assembly that all students would be safe at school and made to feel safe, and I don't feel safe in school. And to this day ... nobody has written back to my child and acknowledged that this teenager reached out and expressed all of this.

I recently was in touch with the vice-principal responsible for him. My son had done something stupid and got in trouble. And she followed up immediately as she should and let me know what happened and let me know what the punishment is. And I accepted all that. But ... I said when he did something wrong, the communication was immediate and plentiful, yet we're still waiting for a reply from November 11th, and she said, oh, well, we got a lot of emails and we couldn't possibly follow up. I'm like, it's three months later. You could have checked in on him and made sure he was okay, or messaged me ... but that just wasn't a concern. And that situation was like really, really harmful to the Jewish students.

This parent also reported that fellow students have yelled “fuck Israel” and “free Palestine” at her son, waved a Palestinian flag and a keffiyeh in his face, and spit on him repeatedly. Yet nothing was ever done to control students who engage in such misbehaviour.

Reportedly, this student has become withdrawn. He has trouble sleeping and often expresses anxiety about school. The absence of an enforced policy for controlling harassment and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, and national origin is partly to blame. As a recent study of nearly 4,200 US students between the ages of twelve and eighteen found, students who attend schools with a written code of student conduct and are aware of the punishments they can expect if they violate the code are significantly less likely to become victims of hateful behaviour than are students who attend schools lacking these features.²⁶

A fourth factor influencing the expression of hate in schools is *the relative size of the victimized group*. As always, there are exceptions, but the US study I cited in the preceding paragraph found that members of the smallest groups in school tend to be most prone to becoming victims of hateful behaviour.

In Ontario's larger urban centres, where nearly all the province's Jews reside, Jewish children often form one of the smallest, if not the smallest, ethno-religious minority in their schools. According to one survey participant in metropolitan Ottawa, it was thus easy for her daughter in grade 6 to become the victim of daily taunts as "Israel girl" in January 2024 because the school has just a few Jewish students. It was also easy for her main antagonist to spread the falsehood that she hates all Muslims, resulting in daily harassment by other students, beginning in the school bus and then spreading to the school's hallways and classrooms. "The Jewish population is less than five kids in her entire school, and she's a public target. It's terrifying for her," the girl's mother recounted.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies can act as a fifth factor promoting hate in schools. Instead of embracing all cultures, seeking to eliminate discrimination, and promoting fairness and equal opportunity, DEI policies may be implemented in such a way as to invalidate certain identities, heighten intolerance, create inequality of opportunity, and thereby increase hostility between groups.²⁷ This outcome occurs when schools distribute rewards such as cultural recognition, social inclusion, and sometimes even grades disproportionately to certain favoured groups, institutionalizing a new system of stratification. One respondent put it simply: "There are larger populations of ethnicities in the school who are treated with priority over smaller ethnic groups."

Consider in this connection the words of a parent whose daughter has attended the same school since senior kindergarten and is now in grade 12. The parent emphasized that the DEI policy of her local school board in a small town west of Toronto "basically divides kids into oppressors and oppressed. And if you are the oppressor group, you will have different ... treatment than the oppressed group [If] you are part of the [oppressed] group ... the treatment of your child will be completely different and much more lenient."

This parent has good reason to be embittered. Her daughter was greeted with a hearty "Heil Hitler" salute by a boy in English class, told that Jews are rich and stingy, placed on a Snapchat "hit list" of the school's Jewish students, and treated to the sight of swastikas scrawled on washroom walls and etched into library and cafeteria tables. Parents reported these and other incidents to school authorities, who failed to comfort or counsel the victims or protect their privacy. Nor were Jewish parents informed if any actions were taken against the perpetrators of anti-Jewish actions

(although it was observed that the Nazi sympathizer in English class was not suspended). In addition,

there were teachers who ... were questioning my kids, asking them if they were Israelis and, you know, drilling into them and putting them into a place where it was very uncomfortable, very unsafe, and almost like interrogating them in the classroom full of children who do not know anything except things that they learned from TikTok. If you want to preserve your identity, if you're proud of your Jewish identity, [school is] an absolutely unsafe place for you. ... Jewish students ... gravitate to each other just for support if that's possible. If not, they try either to downplay or hide their identities or connect with the people who are more sympathetic or apolitical, but most of the time teachers have the power ... to impact their future and their grades, so they definitely don't want to assert their identity as Jewish students. There are lots and lots of kids who need to hide their identities just to get the grades they deserve because teachers, if they think that somebody is from a specific ethnicity, from a specific religion, it absolutely impacts their opinion of these children and their grading of these children.

Resentment of perceived privilege is the sixth factor correlated with hate-related victimization. A small recent study of Canadian Jews who were victims of hate crimes found that the crimes were typically accompanied by accusations of Jews being White, privileged, and powerful.²⁸ Jews do in fact have the highest median household income of all religious groups in Canada, Muslims the lowest.²⁹ And a 2025 survey of 2,821 Canadian adults found that 87 percent of Canadian adults with an opinion on the subject consider Jews “mainly White.” The comparable figure for Muslims is 7 percent.³⁰ These facts point to the often-overlooked reality that hateful treatment of Jews in schools is not exclusively a religious, ethnic, or national dispute, but partly an expression of class and racial resentment.

Finally, protracted social isolation seems to have contributed to the expression of hate in Ontario's schools. The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table reported that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced in-person socialization and increased screen time led to a tripling of clinically significant symptoms of depression and/or anxiety among children between the ages of six and eighteen with no pre-existing psychiatric diagnoses.³¹ These conditions were even more common among children from low-income families, regardless of religion. And they persisted for years. In Ontario and elsewhere, student bullying, fighting, hate crimes, and other misbehaviours increased apace in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic.³² I speculate that, following an extended period of social isolation, widespread loneliness rendered some children especially eager to join groups that promised instant camaraderie, excitement, and unity of purpose, even if that purpose was to hound their Jewish schoolmates.

In sum, seven main factors appear to underlie variation over time and place in anti-Jewish hate incidents in schools. Incidents increase in frequency to the degree that Israeli military engagements with Palestinians become more punishing; parents deny Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and promote hatred of Jews in general; schools do not strive to create an atmosphere in which all groups are respected and control expressions of hate; Jewish students form a small minority in schools; DEI policies are enacted in a way that classifies Jews as members of an oppressor class; antagonism based on class and racial differences is allowed to fester; and the effects of social isolation persist in the post-COVID-19 pandemic years.

I emphasize again that anti-Jewish behaviours are far from universal in Ontario's K-12 schools. However, they are rampant in some parts of the school system, especially, as I will show, in English public schools. And they reach into Jewish schools too because outsiders visit school grounds to splash graffiti on exterior walls, vandalize property, phone in bomb threats, verbally and sometimes physically attack Jewish students on their way to and from school, and on occasion shoot guns at schools.

The expression of anti-Jewish hate in schools is sometimes couched exclusively as denial of the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state—which most Canadian Jews regard as antisemitic because, for them, support for Israel is a key component of their Jewish identity. But, as I demonstrate, anti-Jewish hate is just as often expressed in ways that have nothing to do with Israel. Recall the fable about *Jewish* families pushing Palestinian families out of their homes. Some students proudly display swastikas, proclaim Hitler a hero, assert that “the Nazis should have finished the job” and express the hope that all Jews will soon be dragged off to “the gas chambers” or “the ovens.”

Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people have the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. In a 2024 poll of 588 Canadian Jewish adults, 94 percent of respondents said they believe in the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. In a 2025 follow-up, only 1 percent said they were anti-Zionist.³³ In Canada and elsewhere, the existence of Israel is central to Jewish identity.

Zionism does not preclude the existence of a sovereign Palestinian state in the occupied territories. In fact, 61 percent of Canadian Jews with an opinion on the subject support a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.³⁴ Yet most students who engage in hateful behaviour against their Jewish classmates seem to believe that Zionism is a force that must be destroyed. In their minds, anti-Zionism and antisemitism appear to be fused. They evidently see all Jews as Zionists, all Zionists as Jews. Consequently, many Jewish students repeatedly hear they lack the right to live as individuals, as an ethno-religious group, and as a nation.

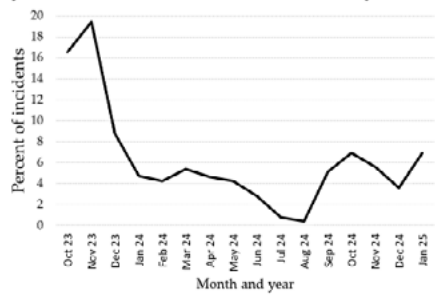
4

Characteristics of Antisemitic Incidents

4.1 Socio-Demographics

The October 7 Hamas pogrom and the ensuing Israeli assault on Gaza provoked a three-month outburst of hostility against Jewish K-12 students such as never before seen in Ontario schools. The survey on which this report is based covers the sixteen months (thirteen school months) between October 2023 and January 2025. Nearly 45 percent of incidents recorded by the survey occurred in the seventy-eight school days between October 7, 2023, and the start of the December 2023 school holiday (Figure 1). Excluding the July–August 2024 summer break, hostilities levelled off at about one-fifth of the level witnessed in October–December 2023. However, a resurgence of hostilities to about one-third the October–December 2023 level took place around the time of the one-year anniversary of the October 7 Hamas pogrom and the outbreak of the Israel–Hamas war.

Figure 1
Incidents by month, October 2023 to January 2025, in percent



Nearly 82 percent of reported incidents took place in Toronto (61 percent) and Ot-tawa (21 percent), Ontario’s major Jewish population centres (Table 2). Nearly 86 percent of recorded incidents occurred in English public schools and Jewish private schools (67 percent and 19 percent, respectively; Table 3). Fewer than 8 percent of incident reports took place in French public schools, and fewer than 5 percent in private non-Jewish schools. English Catholic and French Catholic schools account for a mere 1.5 percent and 0.1 percent of cases, respectively.

Table 2 Incidents by metropolitan census area, in percent	
Census metropolitan area	Percent
Toronto	60.8
Ottawa*	20.9
London	2.6
Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo	1.5
Hamilton	1.5
Kingston	1.2
Barrie	0.9
Guelph	0.9
Oshawa	0.6
Windsor	0.5
Greater Sudbury	0.4
Other	8.2
Total	100.0
**The Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau census metropolitan area.	

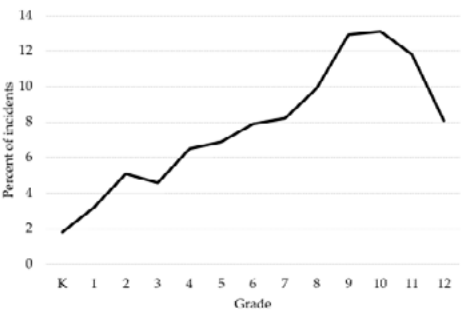
Table 3 “At the time of the incident, what type of school did your child attend?” in percent	
	Percent
English public	66.8
Private Jewish	19.0
French public	7.9
Private non-Jewish	4.6
English Catholic	1.5
French Catholic	0.1
Total	100.0

Table 4 “In which school board was your child’s school at the time of the incident?” in percent	
Toronto District School Board	39.0
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board	19.8
York Region District School Board	15.7
Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario	4.4
Thames Valley District School Board	3.0
Durham District School Board	2.0
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board	1.8
Waterloo Region District School Board	1.8
Peel District School Board	1.7
Conseil scolaire Viamonde	1.5
Ottawa Catholic School Board	1.5
Limestone District School Board	1.3
Simcoe County District School Board	1.3
Upper Grand District School Board	1.3
Greater Essex County District School Board	0.7
Toronto Catholic District School Board	0.5
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario	0.3
Halton District School Board	0.3
Rainbow District School Board	0.3
Avon Maitland District School Board	0.2
Bluewater District School Board	0.2
Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir	0.2
District School Board of Niagara	0.2
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board	0.2
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board	0.2
Trillium Lakelands District School Board	0.2
Upper Canada District School Board	0.2
York Catholic District School Board	0.2
Total	100.0

Respondents were asked to select the name of the school board in which their child was registered at the time of the reported antisemitic incident. Nearly 75 percent of 597 incidents for which respondents provided school board information took place in the TDSB (39 percent), the OCDSB (20 percent), and the York Region District School Board, just north of the City of Toronto (16 percent). The remaining 25 percent of incidents were distributed among twenty-five of Ontario’s eighty-eight school boards (Table 4). No reports were received from the remaining school boards, which cover areas where few Jews reside. This does not mean that no antisemitic incidents occurred there.

The percentage of reported incidents increased steadily from senior kindergarten to grade 10, eased in grade 11, then dropped markedly in grade 12 (Figure 2). I speculate that the decline may be a result of the familiar student practices of (1) trying to stay out of trouble and focus on studying in an attempt to boost grades before applying to college or university, and/or (2) an increased resistance on the part of many older teens to communicate peer issues with their parents because of their underlying need for autonomy and desire for privacy.

Figure 2
Incidents by grade, K-12, in percent



4.2 What Made the Incidents Antisemitic?

The survey asked parents, “In your opinion, what was it about the incident that made it antisemitic? Please select as many of the following options as apply.” Table 5 shows how the 942 closed-ended responses to this question were distributed among the six options provided by the questionnaire. (There are more responses than incidents because respondents could select multiple responses.) It divides the six options into two groups: (1) expressions of negative attitudes toward Jews and (2) expressions of negative attitudes toward Israel.

Table 5 “In your opinion, what was it about the incident that made it antisemitic? Please select as many of the following options as apply,” in percent	
Expressions of negative attitudes toward Jews	
The incident involved Holocaust denial, minimization of the significance of the Holocaust, or saying that Jews use the Holocaust to legitimize their deplorable actions.	9.2
The incident involved assertions of excessive Jewish wealth, political power, or media control.	7.4
The incident involved blanket condemnation of Jews, statements like “Hitler should have finished the job,” “Fuck you Jews,” “Jews are vermin,” and “Jews are cheap.”	23.8
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>40.4</i>
Expressions of negative attitudes toward Israel	
The incident involved extreme negative statements about Israel—for example, that it has no right to exist as a Jewish state, that it is fundamentally a racist state, that it is committing genocide in Gaza, and that Zionism is equal to Nazism.	29.6
The incident involved a child being called a “baby killer,” told to “pick a side” in the Israel-Hamas war, or otherwise treated as if they are personally responsible for what is happening in the Gaza war.	14.2
The incident involved a teacher or a school-sanctioned activity expressing a point of view that made your child feel unwelcome or excluded because your child is Jewish.	15.7
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>59.6</i>
Total	100.0

One is immediately struck by the high percentage of responses that have nothing to do with Israel or the Israel–Hamas war. More than 40 percent of responses involve Holocaust denial, assertions of excessive Jewish wealth or power, or blanket condemnation of Jews—the kind of accusations and denunciations that began to be expunged from the Canadian vocabulary and mindset in the 1960s and were, one would have thought, nearly totally forgotten by the second decade of the twenty-first century. Several times a day on multiple days in September 2024, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl in Waterloo was surrounded by five boys repeatedly shouting “Sieg Heil!” and raising their hands in the Nazi salute. On each occasion she begged them to stop but they persisted. In October 2024, a six-year-old in Ottawa was informed by her teacher that she is only half human because one of her parents is Jewish.

Respondents considered nearly 60 percent of incidents antisemitic because of the extreme anti-Israel sentiments they expressed. Among the anti-Israel responses, more than 14 percent held Jewish school children personally responsible for aspects of the Israel–Hamas war, like the grade 9 boy in the York region north of the City of Toronto who in September 2024 was accused by a classmate of being a “terrorist, rapist, and baby killer.”

Nearly 16 percent of reported incidents involved anti-Israel actions or activities supported or organized by teachers or school administrators. Some teachers wore shirts

with a map of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza that lacked boundaries between regions and was overlaid by the colours of the Palestinian flag or emblazoned with the slogan, “From the river to the sea,” thus graphically and aspirationally denying Israel’s existence. In 2024, one Ottawa teacher noticed a six-year-old Jewish girl wearing a necklace with a pendant in the shape of a map of Israel. She informed the child it is a map of Palestine. When a fellow Jewish student responded, “It’s Israel,” and explained it was a gift from their Hebrew school, the teacher said, “Your Hebrew school teachers are lying.” Still other teachers invited speakers to talk about the Israel–Palestine conflict from a radical Palestinian point of view while failing to invite counterparts to offer a more nuanced interpretation of the complex history of the conflict. Several school trustees sported keffiyehs at school board meetings where parents were expected to raise issues about the mistreatment of their Jewish children. The mother of a grade 12 student in Ottawa reported a November 2023 school assembly in which a speaker minimized the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7. Remarkably, school authorities knew this speaker might well traumatize Jewish students—they arranged beforehand to bring in psychologists to deal with the potential fallout—but they went ahead with the program anyway.

“Only” about 30 percent of responses refer to extreme negative statements about Israel initiated by students.

I treat the 315 “other” responses to this question separately. Written in the words of the respondents themselves, many “other” responses merely elaborated or repeated information already provided. However, nearly 26 percent of the “other” responses glorified Hitler, Nazis, gas chambers, swastikas, and the Holocaust, while almost 14 percent mentioned bomb threats. The latter cases were concentrated in Jewish private schools.

I also examined how types of antisemitic incidents varied across grades 5 to 11. (Earlier and later grades were excluded from this part of the analysis because the number of reports from those grades seemed to me to be insufficient to be reliable.) This exercise revealed no discernible cross-grade trends.

4.3 What Happened during the Incidents?

The survey asked parents, “What happened during the incident? Please select as many of the following options as apply.” Table 6 displays the distribution of the 959 occurrences that parents identified in closed-ended responses.³⁵ (Again, the number of responses is greater than the number of incidents because respondents could select multiple responses.)

The most frequent occurrence, at nearly 35 percent of the total, involved harassment in the form of threats, intimidation, expressions of hatred, incitement to violence, insults, pejorative “jokes,” and the like, delivered face to face, by phone, or online. This category includes one gun threat that led to the aggressor being jailed for several days, suspended from school for ten days, and restricted from certain activities and relationships as his case worked its way to trial. In second place, at more than 17 percent, were teacher- or school-sanctioned activities expressing a point of view that made Jewish children feel unwelcome because they are Jewish. And at just over 6 percent, assaults (hitting, pushing, spitting, throwing objects, touching aggressively, preventing movement) were the least frequent occurrences during an antisemitic incident. Acts of vandalism (nearly 15 percent of occurrences), aggressive hand gestures (more than 10 percent), abusive messages communicated on paper (almost 9 percent) and digitally (nearly 8 percent) round out the picture.

In short, the picture illustrates the way some Ontario schoolchildren treat their Jewish classmates and the manner and degree to which some teachers and school administrators in Ontario disrespect, exclude, and devalue Jewish children, not just by doing little to prevent, stop, and punish antisemitic actions but also by initiating actions that make Jewish students feel unsafe and unwanted.

Table 6 “What happened during the incident? Please select as many of the following options as apply,” in percent	
An assault took place (hitting, pushing, spitting, throwing objects, touching aggressively, preventing movement).	6.2
Vandalism occurred (malicious property damage, defacement, graffiti).	14.9
Spoken harassment was delivered face to face or by phone, Zoom, Teams, etc. (threat, intimidation, expression of hatred, incitement to violence, insults, pejorative “joking”).	34.7
Aggressive hand gestures were made (the Nazi salute, the middle finger, the inverted triangle, shooting, slitting the throat).	10.3
A teacher or a school-sanctioned activity expressed a point of view that made your child feel unwelcome or excluded because your child is Jewish.	17.4
Written abuse was distributed by letter, handbill, poster, sticker, etc.	8.8
Digital abuse authored by fellow students was delivered by email or social media posts.	7.7
Total	100.0

5

Reactions of Victims and Schools

5.1 Victim Reactions

The expression of anti-Jewish hate in schools is bound to affect Jewish children in myriad ways. To help discover these reactions, the survey asked respondents, "How did your child react to the incident? Please select all options that apply." Table 7 categorizes 1,379 discrete responses to the closed-ended part of the question, with multiple responses permitted.

A relatively small percentage of children laughed off the incident (just over 3 percent of reactions), didn't mention it to their parents (just over 5 percent), or decided to combat antisemitism in schools as a consequence of the incident (less than 7 percent). However, the most common emotional reactions involved fear of returning to school or of being bullied (nearly 27 percent), worrying about losing non-Jewish friends and being socially isolated as a consequence (more than 27 percent), and anger about the incident (nearly 31 percent).

Some 221 parents elected to add details in their own words in the open-ended part of the question. Reviewing their verbatim responses, it quickly became clear that while many children reacted by feeling increased pride in their Jewishness, confronting their tormenters, and reporting the incident to school authorities, the great majority also experienced considerable emotional pain. The parents' verbatim answers provide a long list of adjectives attesting to this outcome. They wrote that their children were sad, upset, anxious, depressed, fearful, confused, distraught, and terrified.³⁶ Some children lost trust in school authorities or hid their Jewish identity in school (or in one case literally hid during lunch hour). Others found it difficult to focus on their schoolwork or developed psychosomatic symptoms such as stomach pain and headache. Still others insisted on staying home or switching schools.³⁷ Some cried.

The responses to this question tell us nothing about how long these emotional reactions will last. However, together with the in-depth interviews that supplemented the survey, they do make one *sociological* consequence of antisemitic incidents evident. Many Jewish students banded together for comfort and safety, joined or increased their participation in Jewish organizations, and otherwise added substance to Jean-Paul Sartre's observation that the antisemite helps to create the Jew.³⁸

Table 7 “How did your child react to the incident? Please select all options that apply,” in percent	
My child laughed off the incident.	3.4
My child didn’t mention the incident.	5.4
My child was angry about the incident.	30.7
Because of the incident, my child was afraid of being bullied/returning to school.	26.5
Because of the incident, my child was worried about losing/being socially isolated from non-Jewish friends.	27.1
Because of the incident, my child decided to combat antisemitism in school.	6.8
Total	100.0

5.2 School Reactions

More than 65 percent of respondents reported an antisemitic incident in their child’s school to school authorities. Nearly 35 percent did not. Non-reporting seems to have been mainly the result of two circumstances. Some children insisted that their parents not report the incident, fearing it would become public, and they would consequently become the target of increased harassment or bullying. As the parent of a grade 11 Toronto student said, “My child doesn’t trust school authorities because last time s/he reported an antisemitic ‘Heil Hitler,’ the school didn’t keep it discreet and s/he was bullied afterwards.” Alternatively, some parents believe that reporting the incident would fail to elicit meaningful action from the school, having witnessed or heard as much in the past.

Table 8 corroborates the last point. It categorizes 781 responses to the question, “What did your child’s school do about the incident? Please select all options that apply.” In 49 percent of cases, school authorities did not investigate the reported incident. In an additional 8 percent of cases, their review of the incident led them to conclude—contrary to the assessment of parents and their children—that the incident was not antisemitic. In an admittedly minuscule number of cases, school authorities recommended what amounts to the punishment of victims: in 1 percent of cases, school authorities suggested that the victim be removed from the school permanently or attend school virtually.

Table 8 "What did your child's school do about the incident? Please select all options that apply," in percent	
School authorities did not investigate the incident.	49.0
School authorities said the incident was not a case of antisemitism.	8.2
School authorities recommended that my child be removed from the school permanently.	0.2
School authorities recommended that my child attend school virtually if he/she/ they did not feel safe.	1.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>58.5</i>
School authorities provided counselling for my child.	4.2
School authorities provided counselling for the perpetrator(s).	3.8
School authorities took punitive actions against the perpetrator(s) short of suspension.	6.1
School authorities suspended the perpetrator(s).	4.7
School authorities created or modified a program to promote ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance of Jews.	2.8
The incident was reported to the police.	5.3
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>26.9</i>
Miscellaneous other*	14.6
Total	100.0
Note: The great majority of these cases repeated or elaborated information already provided.	

In a minority of cases, schools responded as they should. They provided counselling for the targeted child (more than 4 percent) or the perpetrator(s) (nearly 4 percent), took punitive action against the perpetrator(s) short of suspension (just over 6 percent), suspended the perpetrator(s) (nearly 5 percent), created or modified a program to promote ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance of Jews (fewer than 3 percent), or reported the incident to police (more than 5 percent). Altogether, and even including additional helpful responses in the "miscellaneous other" category, such responses amounted to well under one-third of the total. On the slightly brighter side, when school authorities responded, more than 60 percent did so within a week of the report (Table 9).

Table 9 "How long did it take for the school to begin taking action in response to the incident?" in percent	
The school began its response within one day.	41.3
The school began its response within one week.	19.2
The school began its response within one month.	5.3
The school began its response more than one month after the incident occurred.	2.3
The school has not taken action in response to the incident.	32.0
Total	100.0

After their children endured antisemitic incidents, about one in eight parents who responded to the survey made the difficult decision to move their children to a different school. In some cases, this involved relocating residences.

Table 10 traces the mobility paths of the children who have switched or will soon be switching schools. More than 88 percent of them have left or are leaving English public schools, more than 8 percent have left or are leaving French public schools, and more than 3 percent have left or are leaving non-Jewish private schools. There are no recorded cases of children leaving Catholic or Jewish schools.

Jewish private schools are the number one choice for a new school. Nearly 39 percent of those leaving follow this route. The percentage would likely be higher if Jewish day schools existed in smaller communities, but in Ontario, only Toronto has a Jewish high school, and outside Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and London, there are no Jewish primary day schools. This means that 9 percent of Ontario's Jews lack access to a full-time Jewish school at any level and 19 percent lack access to a Jewish high school.

Another impediment to enrolment in a Jewish school is that the Ontario government does not fund Jewish schools, unlike the governments of Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia (the only other provinces with substantial Jewish populations). These four provinces offer partial tuition subsidies. Some of Ontario's Jewish schools are subsidized by community philanthropists, but that still leaves many Jews who simply cannot afford to send their children to Jewish schools. Nevertheless, Jewish schools throughout Canada have experienced an enrolment boom since October 2023 because Ontario schools are not unique in experiencing an elevated level of antisemitism.³⁹

Table 10**“After the incident, did you or will you move your child to a(n) _____ school?” in percent**

From	To	#	percent
English public school	English public school	24	25.3
	French public school	5	5.3
	English Catholic school	9	9.5
	French Catholic school	1	1.1
	Non-Jewish private school	8	8.4
	Jewish private school	37	38.9
	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>88.4</i>
French public school	English public school	3	3.2
	French public school	1	1.1
	French Catholic school	4	4.2
	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8.4</i>
Private non-Jewish school	English public school	2	2.1
	French public school	1	1.1
	<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3.2</i>
Total		95	100.0

6

Policy Recommendations

6.1 No *Raskulachivaniye*

Heather Munroe-Blum, former principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University, tells the story of her years attending Huron Street Public School in Toronto's Annex. In the second half of the 1950s, the Annex was a humble neighbourhood populated by many immigrants and first-generation Canadians. When a fresh cohort of immigrant children would arrive in September, veteran students typically regarded them with disdain—as timid, smelly, and poorly dressed newcomers who knew little English and nothing at all about the ins and outs of Canadian school life. However, the school had a buddy system. Immigrant children were routinely paired with veteran students charged with the responsibility of guiding the newcomers through the unfamiliar environment, helping them with English, discovering their interests, explaining norms and rules, introducing them to others, assisting with homework, and the like. By December, says Munroe-Blum, the newcomers were regarded as equal members of the school community. They felt at home.

Everyone likes evidence that confirms their beliefs, and Munroe-Blum's story certainly had that effect on me. I heard it days after completing a report on a survey of about 2,800 Canadian adults' attitudes toward Jews and Muslims.⁴⁰ The survey allowed me to discover myriad (and remarkably similar) social factors underlying attitudes toward the two minority groups. The most important factor by far? Canadians who have generally had good personal experiences with Jews and Muslims tend to have positive attitudes toward all members of the two groups. Canadians deprived of such experiences are far more likely to dislike Muslims and Jews. This generalization holds even for Jewish and Muslim Canadians. Munroe-Blum's story provides touching anecdotal evidence illustrating what my multiple regression analysis demonstrates: even between antagonistic groups, positive experience breeds positive generalized affect.

Ontario's K-12 school authorities need to take the implications of Munroe-Blum's story to heart. They need to help all children, even Jews, feel at home. They can do that only by treating all students as equals. This observation implies that they must expunge the two-class model of oppressors and oppressed that informs the practice of some school trustees, principals, and teachers—a practice that, for example, saw a high school teacher in Ottawa assign a summative English essay requiring students to discuss the work of any author, so long as the author was not White, Russian, or Jewish.⁴¹ School personnel need to be reminded that, since Marx, all two-class models of society have favoured the elimination of the oppressor class, the most extreme cases giving rise to horrors like *raskulachivaniye*, Stalin's 1929–32 liquidation of the kulaks (Ukrainian peasants who were allegedly well-to-do). A better model is implied by humourist Robert Benchley's quip that “there are only two classes of people in the world—those who divide the people of the world into two classes and those

who don't."⁴² Schools must align their policies with those who don't if they have any hope of creating a safe and welcoming place for all students.

6.2 An Effective Code of Student Conduct

In my view, such policies must be based on the formulation, promulgation, and enforcement of a code of student conduct banning harassment and other forms of aggression in schools. Remediation and, if necessary, punishment for transgressions must be clearly stipulated, widely publicized, and rigorously applied. Again I cite research showing that schools with such codes are less riddled with hateful behaviour than are schools lacking such codes.⁴³

I do not mean to imply that schools should ban free speech and open discussion of tough political issues in the higher grades. To the contrary, as a political sociologist, I favour open political discussion and debate in courses such as history, civics, social studies, and global issues. Jewish students would benefit from learning about the Nakba and today's rash of Jewish settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. Muslim and other non-Jewish students would benefit from learning about "Jewish Nakba," the forced migration of 850,000 Mizrahi Jews from Muslim-majority countries, mainly to Israel, in the 1950s, and the way the 138 Palestinian suicide bombings during the second intifada undermined the previously vigorous Israeli peace movement and pushed the Israeli public far to the right. Generating an empathic understanding of the suffering of both sides in the conflict and showing how actions taken by both sides have driven them further apart would do much to lower the temperature in schools.

However, for the edification of all students, political discussion must be respectful and informed. Free speech should be honoured, but one must remember that intimidation is not respectful and sloganeering is not informed.⁴⁴ Students are in school to be educated, not indoctrinated.

6.3 Educate the Educator

The educator, too, needs an education. The Israel-Palestine conflict has generated much rancour in Ontario's schools, but few teachers seem to be equipped to understand let alone teach its complexities. And few appear to have had the training to deal appropriately with student clashes generated by the larger conflict. The solution to this problem has both pedagogical and emotional aspects.

Compulsory professional development days devoted to contemporary antisemitism and the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict led by diverse experts on the subject are needed. I believe a useful pedagogical model would involve a conversation be-

tween knowledgeable instructors who are keen to base their arguments on evidence, eager to entertain questions from and listen to teachers, and able to express empathy toward the other side in the dialogue.

Teachers must also learn how to deal better with intense emotions that students express in hateful and aggressive ways. Quebec has developed a model for handling this problem.

The Quebec Ministry of Education formed a Research and Action on Social Polarization (RAPS) team in 2016. Headed by a transcultural psychiatrist, team members include Arab-Muslim, Jewish, and other clinicians who aim “to understand the social, political and psychological dynamics that fuel ... polarizations and to support the development of effective prevention and intervention programs.”⁴⁵

For example, immediately after October 7, 2023, the RAPS team acted to mitigate conflict in schools. It provided training and webinars for school staff in which strategies were developed “to facilitate safe expression of emotions related to the Middle East conflict and to mitigate hate discourses and actions ... associated with it.”⁴⁶ Within a week, the RAPS team held four webinars for 481 school personnel. The webinars developed strategies that involved providing opportunities for students to hold respectful discussions in which they could express themselves and listen and respond to opposing viewpoints while team members emphasized “the importance of solidarities around civil and human rights and around peacebuilding.” This approach offered the opportunity to frame the conflict in a nuanced way and embrace the value of “shared humanism, dialogue and non-violence.”⁴⁷

No research has yet been conducted on how well or poorly these interventions achieved their aims, but it seems to me that this approach has considerable potential and is therefore worth further investigation.⁴⁸

6.4 Define, Track, and Report

The methods of Ontario schools for reporting antisemitic incidents are inadequate. We need a system to properly track and report such incidents. Setting up such a system might involve the following steps:

1. *Define Jews in a way that is appropriate to the post-emancipation era.* Jews ceased to be a purely religious group when their emancipation began in late 18th century western Europe. Jews today are people who identify as Jewish by religion or who identify with no religion but say they are Jewish by ethnicity, culture, or ancestry. This definition is the social science standard that has been in place in Canada for decades, and it is operationalized in the

Canadian census. By defining Jews as a religious group only, the census of the TDSB, for example, is off to a bad start.

2. *Adopt a definition of antisemitism that respects the Ontario Human Rights Code.* The code outlaws discrimination based not only on the basis of religion and ethnicity but also on the basis of ancestry, place of origin, and citizenship, among other criteria. It follows that bullying, harassment, and all other species of outrageous behaviour against children of Israeli parentage are as discriminatory as such behaviour against children of, say, Somali parentage. The right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state was recommended by a large majority of United Nations member countries in 1947, and Israel is presently recognized by 85 percent of UN member states. It follows that actions denying the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state must be included as instances of hate. The IHRA's definition of antisemitism makes precisely this point. It was adopted by the TDSB in 2018 as part of its equity policy and by the Province of Ontario through an Order in Council in 2020. Now is the time to enforce the definition.
3. *Create an online system allowing students, parents, and staff to easily report antisemitic incidents.* All such reports must be investigated and verified. Once corroborated, they should be added to online tallies, giving students, parents, teachers, and administrators a timely picture of how well they are doing in their struggle against hate in schools. In addition, an annual report should analyze the year's incidents and compare them to incidents in previous years. Of course, a reporting system like the one I've described should not be restricted to antisemitic incidents. Jews are far from the only objects of hate in Ontario schools. Islamophobia, transphobia, anti-Black racism, and other prejudices are widespread, and all should be laid bare to assist in their elimination.

6.6 Conclusion: Is a Multicultural Revival Possible?

It was only in the 1960s that most Jews started feeling completely at home in Canada. Non-Jews were becoming more tolerant, and obstacles to entering the country's economic, political, and social mainstream weakened substantially. The Jewish community soon became a model of the 1970s multiculturalist ideal. That is, while remaining ethnically cohesive, the community forged strong ties to non-Jewish society and contributed much—professionally and philanthropically—to medicine, education, science, jurisprudence, government, the economy, and the arts.⁴⁹ The standing and reception of the Jewish community advanced to the point where Irving Abella, the late dean of Canadian Jewish historians, wrote in the 2012 edition of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* that “anti-Semitism is no longer ... a major concern for Canadian Jews.” Other scholars and public opinion polls echoed his observation, at least until 2022.⁵⁰

Abella’s encyclopedia entry was updated after his death. The passage I just quoted was removed in the encyclopedia’s 2023 edition. And for good reason. Today, most Canadian Jews are shocked and angered by the antisemitism they confront online, at work, on the streets, in universities, and in schools. The parents who participated in the survey on which this report is based were asked to “Please indicate whether you think each of the following groups is often, sometimes, rarely, or never the object of hate in Canadian society today. Hate may be expressed as insults, harassment, vandalism, or physical assault.” Their responses are striking. Nearly 90 percent of respondents claimed that Jews are “often” the object of hate in Canadian society, a score more than 43 percentage points higher than that accorded to transgender people, perceived to be the second most hated group (Table 11).

These and other findings of this study seem to me to pose a tough question: Must we now refer to Canada’s multicultural era exclusively in the past tense? I believe the answer to that question depends heavily on whether Canadian governments, corporations, universities, schools, and other organizations enact and enforce policies that speak firmly to values Canadians once proudly upheld.

Table 11 “Please indicate whether you think each of the following groups is often, sometimes, rarely, or never the object of hate in Canadian society today. Hate may be expressed as insults, harassment, vandalism, or physical assault,” in percent						
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	DK/NA	Total
Jewish people	0.4	0.6	8.8	89.9	0.3	100.0
Transgender people	1.3	9.0	36.2	46.5	7.0	100.0
Indigenous/Aboriginal people	3.1	12.8	40.3	38.7	5.1	100.0
Black people	1.5	8.6	49.0	36.7	4.1	100.0
Gay and lesbian people	2.4	15.4	51.2	27.0	4.0	100.0
Muslim people	3.3	23.6	48.0	21.1	4.0	100.0
South Asian people	1.8	14.9	57.1	19.6	6.7	100.0
Chinese people	2.9	20.9	54.7	15.5	6.0	100.0

Appendix

Sample and population characteristics

To illustrate how the sample compares to Ontario’s Jewish population, I highlight two important features of the sample and the population: area of residence and connection to organized Jewish life. In one instance I must use Toronto data as a proxy for all of Ontario, which is less problematic than it may seem since more than 81 percent of Ontario’s Jews live in the Toronto census metropolitan area according to the 2021 Census of Canada.

Table A1 shows where Ontario’s Jews and survey respondents reside. It divides both groups into the province’s eleven census metropolitan areas with more than one thousand Jews each and an “other” category for the rest of the province.

Table A1 Jewish population, Ontario 2021, and percent of sample, by census metropolitan areas with more than 1,000 Jews			
	Jewish population	percent of Jewish population	percent of sample
Census metropolitan area			
Toronto	186,905	81.4	60.8
Ottawa*	14,045	6.1	20.9
Hamilton	5,310	2.3	1.5
London	2,765	1.2	2.6
Barrie	2,275	1.0	0.9
Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo	2,245	1.0	1.5
St. Catharines-Niagara	1,710	0.7	0
Oshawa	1,645	0.7	0.6
Kingston	1,410	0.6	1.2
Windsor	1,270	0.6	0.5
Guelph	1,210	0.5	0.9
Other**	5,950	3.9	8.6
Total	229,485	100.0	100.0
*The Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau census metropolitan area.			
**Includes areas outside census metropolitan areas.			
Source for column 1: Charles Shahar, <i>2021 Census: The Jewish Population of Canada</i> (Jewish Federations of Canada-UIA and CIJA, 2024), 58.			

The biggest difference between the sample and the population concerns the percentage of respondents from Toronto and Ottawa, by far the two largest Jewish centres in Ontario. The Toronto sample is about 18 percentage points smaller than the corresponding figure for the population, while the Ottawa sample is about 15 percentage points larger. I attribute these results to the survey’s relatively more effective advertising campaign in Ottawa. This difference notwithstanding, the social

composition of Jews in Toronto and Ottawa does not appear to be very different. For example, the Jewish communities in the two cities had the identical median age in 2021: 42.4 years.⁵¹ And the denominational breakdown of Jews is not greatly dissimilar in the two cities, the main difference being the higher percentage of Reform Jews in Toronto and of nondenominational Jews in Ottawa (Table A2). The latter differences may balance out insofar as Reform and nondenominational Jews are the least traditional Jews in Canada.

Table A2 Denominational distribution of Toronto Jews, 2018, and Ontario, Toronto, and Ottawa Jews in the sample, in percent				
	Toronto 2018	Ontario sample	Toronto sample	Ottawa sample
Orthodox*	17	10	10	15
Conservative	27	38	38	34
Reform	17	18	20	10
Other denomination**	13	4	5	3
No denomination; just Jewish	26	29	28	38
Total	100	100	100	100
*Includes Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Hasidic, Yeshivish, and Chabad. **Includes Reconstructionist, Humanist, Humanitarian, Renewal, and other. Source for column 1: Robert Brym et al., <i>2018 Survey of Jews in Canada</i> (Environics Institute, 2019), www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/project-documents/2018-survey-of-jews-in-canada-2018-survey-of-jews-in-canada---final-report.pdf .				

Second, as might be expected given this study’s methodology, the sample consists of individuals who are more connected to organized Jewish life than are Jews in Ontario’s population. Thus, according to the *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada*, 70 percent of Toronto’s Jewish households have at least one member who belongs to a synagogue or a Jewish organization other than a synagogue.⁵² The comparable percentage is undoubtedly lower in other Ontario cities.⁵³ For this study’s sample, the corresponding figure is 99 percent. Similarly, according to the 2021 census, nearly 86 percent of Ontario’s Jews said they identify with the Jewish religion.⁵⁴ The corresponding figure for this study’s sample is more than 97 percent.

In sum, while the sample cannot be considered representative of the Ontario Jewish population, available data suggest that it is not hugely different from the roughly two-thirds of Ontario’s Jews who are relatively well connected to the community in belief, identification, and membership.

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