

Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh

Over the past three years, and especially since October 7, 2023, Jewish students on Pittsburgh campuses have faced a disturbing increase in antisemitism. What was once thought to be rare has become a reality that too many students have experienced firsthand.

At the University of Pittsburgh, Jewish students have reported harassment, intimidation, vandalism, and exclusion because of their Jewish identity. In 2024, two visibly Jewish students were attacked near the Cathedral of Learning and struck with a glass bottle, leaving one with cuts and another requiring medical treatment. In a separate incident, a Jewish Pitt student wearing a Star of David necklace was confronted with antisemitic slurs before being physically assaulted in Oakland. Federal authorities later brought hate crime charges related to that attack. University reports have also documented multiple assaults against visibly Jewish students, antisemitic graffiti, harassment, and hateful messaging on and around campus.

These incidents are not isolated. They are part of a broader rise in antisemitism that Jewish students have been forced to navigate in classrooms, residence halls, student organizations, and online spaces. Many have reported feeling pressure to hide their Jewish identity, stay silent about their beliefs, or think twice before participating fully in campus life.

Here at the Community Relations Council, we have seen this trend firsthand. Since October 7, 2023, there has been an explosion in the number of hate and bias incidents reported to us. Our team regularly responds to incidents involving Jewish students at colleges and universities across our region. We work with campus administrators, law enforcement, and community partners to ensure concerns are addressed and that students know they are not facing these challenges alone.

But our work does not stop at the university level. We are increasingly responding to incidents in middle schools and high schools throughout our community. In fact, just this past week alone, we responded to reports of a high school teacher allegedly teaching students that Hamas is not a terrorist organization and that Israel has no right to exist. We responded to a case in which a Jewish student was called a “dirty Jew” and had pennies thrown at him. We responded to an incident where a Jewish student was called a racist and a genocider solely because he was Jewish. And we responded to a report involving a Jewish child who was blamed for genocide and had his face digitally superimposed onto the body of a concentration camp prisoner, not because of anything he had done, but solely because he had a Jewish-sounding last name.

These are not political disagreements. These are not debates about policy. These are examples of students being targeted because of who they are. No child should be

harassed, ostracized, or blamed for the actions of others because they are Jewish. No student should walk into a classroom wondering if their identity will make them a target.

The rise in antisemitism should concern every member of our community, regardless of religion, race, or background. This is not simply a Jewish issue. It is a challenge to the values of inclusion, dignity, and respect that our schools and universities are meant to uphold.

Our responsibility is clear. We must speak out against antisemitism whenever and wherever it appears. We must support those who are targeted. And we must ensure that every student, regardless of their faith or background, can learn in an environment free from fear and intimidation.

Silence has never defeated hate. Education, partnership, and moral courage can.