

Good morning, Chairman and members of the Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. It is an honor.

My name is Julie Webb. I am a public school history and Spanish teacher, a mother, a Pennsylvanian, and I am Jewish. I am here today as a private citizen to speak about a matter of public concern, antisemitism and activism in our public schools and in curriculums. I am not speaking on behalf of my employers, or any organization. I am using the world history curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia as an example of what I believe to be happening in history classrooms across the Commonwealth.

As a history teacher, I believe that being an activist about any political cause has no place in the classroom. In my school district activism is happening in the classroom. A history teacher's most important job is to teach students how to determine whether a source is reliable, how to recognize bias, how to research different sides of an issue, and how to come to their own conclusions based on evidence. We cannot allow teachers to move from teaching history into swaying students about political issues. The School District of Philadelphia's Board Policy 119 addresses "controversial issues." It calls for discussion that is free from coercion and bias and says controversial issues can be used to help students explore different sides of an issue fairly. It also says that instruction should not be used to indoctrinate or persuade students. Students should learn how to have difficult conversations. But there is a difference between teaching students *about* a controversial issue and using the classroom to *advocate* for one side of that issue.

In the aftermath of October 7, 2023, I have seen examples of history teachers presenting contested claims about Israel without presenting evidence or perspectives that challenge those claims. That concerns me, not because I believe students should be protected from ideas I disagree with, but because I believe they should be exposed to the evidence necessary to evaluate those ideas for themselves.

One example of using biased sources in the District world history curriculum is the Resistance Movement Memorial Project in Quarter 3, Unit 2. Students choose a resistance movement from a list provided. The materials provided dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contain characterizations of Israel, including references to Israel as an apartheid state and accusations of genocide. Students should be allowed to encounter those arguments. But if they are presented as established facts rather than contested claims, without giving sources with competing perspectives, then we are no longer teaching history. We are activists with a captive and vulnerable audience, the over 197,000 students in the School District of Philadelphia.

Another example of inequity and activism in the world history curriculum is the imbalanced treatment of Jews as marginalized people, compared with other marginalized groups included. When the curriculum discusses Indigenous history and Black South African history, students learn not only about their oppression, but also about resistance, language reclamation, and resilience. The Jewish history part of the unit only teaches students about their persecution. There is much less about Jewish resistance, survival. Jewish students deserve to see their culture represented equitably in the school curriculum.

As a Jewish person, in my classroom, I have found a swastika drawn on an eraser, and a giant "Jew" word written on a desk which I could not erase. I reported both of these incidents to my administrators and completed the discrimination/harrassment form for teachers. However, aside from preliminary questioning of me, nothing resulted from my reporting. Colleagues have gotten heil hitler salutes, and other swastika drawings, which were also reported to no avail. Each time there is a lack of follow through on the part of the building administration or district in these complaints, there is damage to the person who is offended.

As a Jewish mother. I teach my own children (not my students) to be proud of their heritage, accomplishments of Jews throughout history and to have a love of Israel as our indigenous homeland. Israel is a country where Jews can go and not feel discriminated against. The need for Israel especially

came about after hundreds of years of persecution, expulsion and genocide that we have endured and survived. I feel sadness for anyone's Jewish child who has to experience sitting in a classroom where someone is vilifying the existence of Israel and as an extension, the very existence of the Jewish people. As a mother, I want my children to be taught the truth, including facts that may be uncomfortable or complicated. I don't want their teachers telling them what political position they should take. My heart hurts for the children who are damaged by these activist teachers, along with their parents having to fight this fight, that shouldn't be a fight at all in public education.

I believe school districts should have a meaningful process for reviewing curriculum for omissions, factual inaccuracies, loaded framing, one-sided source selection, and advocacy, regardless of which political direction that advocacy comes from. I also think there needs to be better investigation into any discrimination/harrassment for any protected class of people, along with restorative practices to help students learn the damage their actions cause. There should be better communication with the victim about the disposition of the complaint.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and for allowing me to testify.