



## **An Analysis of the Root Causes of Dangerously High Antisemitism in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP)**

February 2025 preliminary findings. In-depth report forthcoming; for more information, please contact  
Rebecca Schgallis, [schools@camera.org](mailto:schools@camera.org)

1. SDP revised its social studies curriculum several years ago to focus entirely on antiracism and social justice ideology based on the oppressor-oppressed binary. The oppressor-oppressed binary underlying these theories labels Jews, because of their perceived success and perceived “whiteness” despite thousands of years of persecution, as settler-colonial oppressors.
2. Students receive explicit repeated instruction for four years on interpretative theories, such as decolonization and settler colonialism, as undisputed facts, while never receiving instruction in major events and movements in American and World History. Consistent with what has been observed on college campuses and in other K-12 schools, universities and schools that embrace and promote radical social justice ideology based on the oppressor-oppressed binary create an environment that is ultimately hostile to Jews who are viewed as settler colonists/white oppressors.
3. Multiple teachers, including the Director of Social Studies Curriculum, serve as writers and editors for radical anti-American and anti-Israel curricula organizations, including the Zinn Education Project and Rethinking Schools, where they produce articles promoting the oppressor-oppressed binary, decolonization, and anti-Zionism. These teachers are also active members of Philly Educators' for Palestine, which has staged protests and petitioned SDP to condemn Israel.
4. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has endorsed the Center for Black Educator Development (CBED), whose founder Sharif El-Mekki has familial ties to the Black Panther Party and Iran and promotes a radical antiracist educational agenda calling teaching a “political act.”<sup>1</sup> SDP, and other school districts across the country, have contracts with CBED. Several SDP educators have close ties with the CBED founder.
5. SDP staff, emboldened by district policy and curriculum, use their classrooms to create radical student activists and have created an environment that is outright hostile and threatening to Jewish students and families. One student reports: *It's all day, every day. It's like breathing*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thecenterblacked.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CBED21-A2E-Retention-Toolkit-012.pdf>

*poisoned air. Somebody will say right out loud that they hate Jews or Israel, and an adult will hear it, and there will be no consequences.”<sup>2</sup>*

The recent [Title VI resolution](#) includes antisemitism training and oversight of SDP for neglecting to adequately address antisemitism in its district. Unfortunately, these recommendations do not address the underlying cause of antisemitism in SDP and are inadequate to address the serious systemic issues in the school district.

In 2020, School superintendent William R. Hite Jr. announced the revision of the curriculum to make it antiracist, the creation of an equity panel, and the requirement of antiracist and bias training for all staff and students.<sup>3</sup> Hite called for district employees to embrace “anti-racism,” and engage in “bold action.”<sup>4</sup>

SDP soon adopted an antiracism framework for its high school social studies program. Antiracism as defined by its practitioners entails actively dismantling so-called systemic racism. SDP’s social studies courses not only use antiracism as the sole lens for understanding history and current social problems, but each quarter also has supplementary “Antiracism and Social Justice Supplemental Resources.”

Antiracism and Social Justice Supplemental Resources are based on the [Southern Poverty Law Center’s \(SPLC\) Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards](#). SPLC’s standards focus on three core areas: identity, justice, and action. Learning for Justice has promoted a one-sided, factually inaccurate account of the Hamas-Israel conflict platforming widely known anti-Israel activists in its work.<sup>5</sup>

SDP’s required social studies courses are World History, American History (since Reconstruction), African American History (an SDP specific requirement for over fifteen year), and Government.<sup>6</sup> SDP’s social studies curriculum is thematic and topical, not chronological. The following major topics in American and World History are excluded: the American Revolution, the Federal and Jacksonian Eras, the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, French Revolution, World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, and the Cold War. Instead, topics are chosen to illuminate the three “sins” of the West over the four-year curricula:

1. Capitalism: lesson plans and resources critique capitalism but offer no similar critique of socialism and communism. The horrors of communist regimes are excluded from the social studies curriculum.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-files-title-vi-complaint-against-school-districtphiladelphia-charging>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local\\_news/school-district-of-philadelphia-outlines-anti-racisminitiative/article\\_c01edb15-9242-51e4-a2ac-65bbf6341f62.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local_news/school-district-of-philadelphia-outlines-anti-racisminitiative/article_c01edb15-9242-51e4-a2ac-65bbf6341f62.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://delawarevalleyjournal.com/battle-over-critical-race-theory-comes-to-the-delaware-valley/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.camera-edu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CEI-Booklet.pdf>; 6.

<sup>6</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yqHYdWE772tofmDMZrj6oqzgJ7PVe\\_fpFNPM4yuSQb8/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yqHYdWE772tofmDMZrj6oqzgJ7PVe_fpFNPM4yuSQb8/edit?tab=t.0) <sup>7</sup>  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17meyziGdqGkJ25BtZrGjL5SjL3qMnmSc\\_6twr0moys/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17meyziGdqGkJ25BtZrGjL5SjL3qMnmSc_6twr0moys/edit?tab=t.0)  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZFhfnCo1w26BPUIOxTxc13cSGt3yd0XH3CbkU5Bin88/edit?tab=t.0>

2. Settler Colonialism and decolonization: lesson plans and resources provide readings in settler colonialism ideology and multiple so-called examples of the phenomenon across the globe.
3. Racism: white supremacy is emphasized repeatedly on an almost daily basis in the social studies lessons.

Lesson plans include readings and videos on concepts related to critical race theory including intersectionality.<sup>7</sup>

Students are constantly encouraged and directed to “ally” with platformed victim groups. For example, in a lesson on the Great March of Return (the 2018 protest where Gazans marched to the Israeli border threatening the destruction of the Jewish state) students are directed to Qatari-operated newspaper *AlJazeera* to gather information to build a “resistance memorial” falsely highlighting the event as an example of “colonialism, racial justice, and indigenous” people.<sup>8</sup>

Instruction on world religions is also highly problematic and limited in coverage for Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Many of the resources on Judaism are inaccurate. In a lesson comparing the Torah’s and the Qur’an’s so-called interpretation on war, one brief excerpt from the Torah is explained as offering “divine endorsement for aggressive warfare” by “extremist groups.” The Qur’anic passage, which also seemingly advocates for war, however, also includes later commentary explicitly stating that the passage should be read in its historical context.

Moreover, students are given passages from sharia law in a lesson on Islamic finances, thereby normalizing a doctrine that is used to deny Muslim women and minorities rights in Muslim societies throughout the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> Another lesson defines “jihad” as “just war theory.”<sup>10</sup>

In another lesson plan, students read a selection by Edward Said on orientalism, an academic theory that has been used to justify “resistance movements” especially against Israel.<sup>11</sup> Another lesson includes an activity asking students to redefine “terrorism.”<sup>12</sup>

Radical staff and teachers using their classrooms to promote a one-sided, inaccurate, and often antisemitic view of Israel are not the fringe in SDP, but they hold influential roles in the school district. For example, the Director of Social Studies is Ismael Jimenz who has a poster celebrating cop killer Assata Shakur in his office and spreads lies about Israel on his social media account. In one post, he writes, “Very few people are aware of [or] even acknowledge the connection of Israel with the system of white supremacy.” Jimenz has denied the atrocities of October 7<sup>th</sup>: “The focus is Israeli state violence.. over 2,000

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<sup>7</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yqHYdWE772tofmDMZrj6oqzgJ7PVe\\_fpFNPM4yuSQb8/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yqHYdWE772tofmDMZrj6oqzgJ7PVe_fpFNPM4yuSQb8/edit?tab=t.0)

<sup>8</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZFhfnCo1w26BPUIOxTxe13cSGt3yd0XH3CbkU5Bin88/edit?tab=t.0>

<sup>9</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/10DxLJ176syt\\_0W7cnV5CmtUTIQJm39dOBOvYdItdc9Y/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10DxLJ176syt_0W7cnV5CmtUTIQJm39dOBOvYdItdc9Y/edit?tab=t.0)

<sup>10</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VFPU0ZxgPcEEiuEmaG1gBxYe70B7y6v5/view>

<sup>11</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12PG2oMpeV1YfidwydvffpgA162adTi7c/view>

<sup>12</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XDQv-rvXNzDjbdWhiSqy-a14Ich49z7o/view>

Palestinian deaths and 56 Israeli's [sic] death ....sounds like a slaughter and Hamas isn't doing the slaughtering. Also, it was proven recently that Hamas had nothing to do with kidnapping that started current invasion of the Gaza strip[.]”<sup>13</sup>

Teachers engaging in anti-Israel indoctrination run the new teacher trainings, are leading writers at radical anti-Western and anti-Israel curricula and teaching organizations, run community “teach-ins” on Palestine, and use their social media without attempting to separate their personal viewpoints on Jews, Israel, and other topics from their professional capacity as SDP employees.

Leadership at the top level of SDP has shown explicit hostility to Israel and the Jewish community. For example, Assistant Superintendent Jamina Clay called the Israeli military “terrorists” and was compelled to step down from her school board seat in a neighboring district but has continued in her role in SDP.<sup>14</sup>

Resources from the Zinn Education Project and Rethinking Schools are included in the SDP social studies curriculum. The Zinn Education Project is a project of Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change and produces social justice resources.<sup>15</sup> Rethinking Schools is a nonprofit publisher “dedicated to sustaining and strengthening public education through social justice teaching and education activism.”<sup>15</sup> All three organizations promote the oppressor-oppressed binary and provide numerous factually inaccurate resources about the history of the Palestinians and Israel serving to erase, delegitimize, and demonize Israel and the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel.

Teaching for Change has received money from the anti-Israel Tides Foundation. The Tides Foundation played a significant role in the violent protests against Israel immediately after October 7<sup>th</sup> and the college encampments.<sup>16</sup>

Rethinking Schools has a forthcoming book to be published in February 2025 titled, *Teaching Palestine*. One of the essays, “Teaching Solidarity: The Black Freedom Struggle and Palestine-Israel,” was written by four SDP teachers: Hannah Gann, Nick Palazzolo, Keziah Ridgeway, and Adam Sanchez highlighting the so-called intersectional struggle between oppressed groups.

Adam Sanchez, an editor of *Rethinking Schools* magazine, a Zinn Education Project teacher leader, and an SDP teacher recently published “Defenders of Israel Attempt to Silence Anti-Racist Educators in Philadelphia.” According to Sanchez, most of the SDP educators accused of antisemitism are part of the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://archive.md/g4ACW#selection-1991.0-1993.34>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.inquirer.com/education/jamina-clay-colonial-school-district-resignation-20231117.html> <sup>15</sup> [CAMERA Education Institute Anti-Israel Curricula and Resources](https://www.camera.org/education-institute/anti-israel-curricula-and-resources), 7.

<sup>15</sup> <https://rethinkingschools.org/about-rethinking-schools/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/2695620/democratic-dark-money-giant-behind-anti-israel-protests-has-scored-81m-in-taxpayer-dollars/>

Racial Justice Organizing Committee (RJOC) which is a caucus within the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. RJOC organized the Black Lives Matter Week of Action which the SDP school board eventually made an official school district event.<sup>17</sup> BLM and BLM-At-School have promoted antisemitism including a BLM chapter celebrating the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas attack.<sup>18</sup>

RJOC also organized multiple “teach-ins” after October 7, 2023 and in 2024. RJOC provided lessons from Teach Palestine, an anti-Israel, pro-terror “curriculum” project of the Middle East Children’s Alliance.<sup>19</sup>

SDP teachers have continually made the Hamas-Israel conflict a central focus of their teaching in the classroom and on their social media, where they do not separate their personal views from their professional roles as educators. In the classroom, SDP teachers wear keffiyehs and t-shirts expressing their support for Palestine. On their social media, they engage in spreading falsehoods and blood libels against Israel. They often repost social media produced by organizations, like the Palestinian Youth Movement which has openly supported Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Jewish families have raised their concerns with SDP administrators about these teachers who have used their classrooms to indoctrinate students. In response, SDP current and retired teachers have launched a vicious retaliation campaign against Jewish families endangering their safety. At school board meetings, teachers dressed in keffiyehs have spoken against so-called “Zionist white supremacists” who object to their antisemitism.

In one of the worst incidents, SDP teacher Keziah Ridgeway named Jewish parents on her social media in one post, followed by two others that implied she was looking to get a gun.<sup>20</sup> While she has been placed on administrative leave after more than a year of harassing the Jewish community, her colleagues have actively protested and called for her reinstatement. Ridgeway continues to push her support for terrorism against Jews on social media. In February 2025, she reposted a social media post by a former *Al-Jazeera* journalist parroting Hamas propaganda claiming that the photograph of the Israeli hostage being forced to kiss the head of the Hamas terrorists flanking him with guns is actually “The Kiss that Fractured the Lie.”

SDP teachers also have connections with universities. Social Studies Director Ismael Jimenz has been an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education and has worked with

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<sup>17</sup> <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/defenders-of-israel-attempt-to-silence-anti-racist-educators-inphiladelphia/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/black-lives-matters-jewish-problem-in-their-own-words/>;

<https://www.adl.org/resources/article/fringe-left-groups-express-support-hamass-invasion-and-brutalattacks-israel>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.camera-edu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CEI-Booklet.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.jns.org/philadelphia-teacher-reassigned-offsite-while-public-school-district-investigatesalleged-jew-hatred/>

Villanova University and LaSalle University.<sup>21</sup> Jimenz has also facilitated professional development opportunities at Penn State and Princeton.<sup>22</sup>

Ridgeway appeared with fired Muhlenberg professor Maura Finkelstein on February 5, 2025 as part of the Cooper Series at Swarthmore College. Ridgeway has developed curriculum for the Colored Conventions lessons for the University of Delaware.<sup>23</sup>

Jimenz also has connections to the larger network of K-12 social justice ideologues. In a webinar sponsored by Haymarket Books, a far-left book publisher, Jimenz appeared with Jesse Hagopian. Hagopian leads BLM-At-School and is part of Zinn Education, Rethinking Schools, and the Coalition for Liberated Ethnic Studies.<sup>24</sup> Other SDP teachers including Adam Sanchez have collaborated with Hagopian.

SDP's issues with systemic antisemitism, however, are also rooted in their connection with an influential figure in Pennsylvania K-12 education: Sharif El-Mekki.

El-Mekki is the son of Aisha El-Mekki, a member of the Black Panther Party, who, according to a biography by the Philly Muslim Freedom Fund written in 2020, was intrigued by the Iranian Revolution and moved her family, including Sharif to the country for ten non-consecutive years. According to the biography, Aisha El-Mekki even met Ayatollah Khomeini. Her biography describes her decades of attendance at al-Quds Day demonstrations against Zionism on the last day of Ramadan.<sup>25</sup>

Sharif El-Mekki is a former teacher and principal, as well as the founder of the Center for Black Educator Development (CBED) created in 2019. CBED's goal is to "build a pipeline of 'same-race teachers' who 'demonstrate high levels of expertise in anti-racist mindsets.'"<sup>26</sup> According to CBED's website, they have trained over 1700 educators.

CBED has a budget of almost \$20 million with grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, NBC Universal, Nike, the Bezos Family Foundation, and the University of Pennsylvania School of Education.<sup>27</sup>

El-Mekki has extensive influence within Pennsylvania and nationally. Sharif was selected as part of the Principal Ambassador Fellowship in the U.S. Department of Education under the Obama Administration.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/op-ed-africana-studies-can-save-education%E2%80%94and-world>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.activismbeyondtheclassroom.com/activist-groups/2019/7/23/ismaeljimenez>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.keziahridgeway.com/more-about-me>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.camera-edu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CEI-Booklet.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> [https://phillymuslimfreedomfund.org/bio\\_mama\\_aisha.pdf](https://phillymuslimfreedomfund.org/bio_mama_aisha.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://thecenterblacked.org/about/theory-of-change/>; [https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local\\_news/report-black-teacher-pipeline-effort-helping-where-teachers-can-advance/article\\_9847568e-ff86-5797-be34-62790964aea5.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local_news/report-black-teacher-pipeline-effort-helping-where-teachers-can-advance/article_9847568e-ff86-5797-be34-62790964aea5.html)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.thefp.com/p/black-nationalist-josh-shapiro-segregation-bill-and-melinda-gates-foundation>

He served on Governor Shapiro's Pre-K-12 Subcommittee transition team and even testified before the Congressional House Committee on Education and the Workforce on September 25, 2024 on "Rebuilding the Black Teacher Pipeline."<sup>28</sup>

CBED has received \$560,000 in contracts from 2022 to 2024 with the Philadelphia School District to "address educational inequalities and our nation's racist history."<sup>29</sup> Other school districts are establishing contracts with CBED as well as universities.<sup>30</sup>

SDP teachers have close ties with Sharif El-Mekki. Director of Social Studies Instruction Jimenz has appeared on El-Mekki's podcast affirming that they are explicitly teaching the oppressor-oppressed binary as fact to students. They also appeared on a podcast titled, "An Educator's Guide to the Middle East Conflict, Islamophobia, and Anti-Semitism."<sup>31</sup> The Melanated Educators Collective, which is made up of many SDP teachers, has promoted a CBED video called *Black Educators: A History of Shaping the Future* which features El-Mekki and Jimenz and Ridgeway. In 2024, Jimenz awarded El-Mekki the Septima Clark Education for Liberation Black History Month Award at the SDP 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Rosa Parks Birthday Celebration. According to Jimenz, "Not only does the work of Sharif and the Center for Black Education impact education in real time today [insert black power fist emoji] it also is laying the groundwork for solidifying a pipeline for Black educators to join the teaching profession for the future."<sup>32</sup>

This briefing raises serious questions and concerns about systemic issues, including the outside network support causing antisemitism in the School District of Philadelphia.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2022/12/pa-josh-shapiro-governor-transition-team-full-list/>;  
<https://thecenterblacked.org/the-centers-ceo-testifies-on-capitol-hill-for-educator-diversity/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.thefp.com/p/black-nationalist-josh-shapiro-segregation-bill-and-melinda-gates-foundation>  
<https://philasd.novusagenda.com/agendapublic/Coversheet.aspx?ItemID=4702&MeetingID=263>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.thefp.com/p/black-nationalist-josh-shapiro-segregation-bill-and-melinda-gates-foundation>  
<https://www.edpost.com/podcasts/teaching-about-islamophobia-anti-semitism-and-the-middle-east>

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ishx2022\\_it-was-an-honor-last-night-to-give-the-2024-activity7162164884804206592-IKRI](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ishx2022_it-was-an-honor-last-night-to-give-the-2024-activity7162164884804206592-IKRI)