

**EMBARGOED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 10th at 7AM ET**

**Email subject line:** Feds to Investigate Two Schools – CA Public School and NY Performing Arts College – Over Anti-Semitism Against Jewish Students

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## **FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS INVESTIGATIONS OPENED INTO TWO SCHOOLS OVER ALLEGED ANTI-SEMITISM AGAINST JEWISH STUDENTS**

*Investigations follow Brandeis Center, ADL and StandWithUs complaints alleging young Jewish students faced anti-Semitic harassment, retaliation and hostile educational environments at a California public school and New York performing arts college*

**Washington, D.C.** – The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has opened two federal civil rights investigations into the Etiwanda School District in California and the American Musical Dramatic Academy (AMDA) in New York following complaints alleging that two Jewish students faced anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination in educational settings and that their schools failed to adequately protect them. The [Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](#) and [Anti-Defamation League](#) (ADL) filed the complaint against the AMDA while the Brandeis Center, ADL, and [StandWithUs](#) filed the complaint against the Etiwanda School District.

The complaints allege separate but serious failures to protect Jewish students under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color and national origin, including discrimination against Jews based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, in federally funded educational programs. Both investigations stem from [complaints](#) filed by the Brandeis Center, alongside ADL and StandWithUs, that brought the alleged anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination facing the Jewish students to the attention of federal civil rights officials and urged OCR to intervene

At Etiwanda Intermediate School, the [complaint](#) alleged that a seventh grade Jewish student was subjected to persistent anti-Semitic harassment and that the district failed to respond appropriately to the original incidents. On school grounds, a fellow student struck the Jewish student repeatedly with a stick and then with her bare hands. When the Jewish student called out for help, she was told to “shut [her] stupid Jewish ass up.” She was then pinned against a table and choked for several seconds, until she escaped. Subsequent harassment based on her Jewish identity went on in her classroom. She was humiliated and marginalized by a different peer and told, “This wouldn’t be an issue if you weren’t Jewish.”

The Brandeis Center, ADL and StandWithUs subsequently notified OCR of additional anti-Semitic incidents as the hostile environment continued, including students giving Nazi salutes in the hallways, the drawing of swastikas, praise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, Holocaust taunts and anti-Jewish slurs. In one incident, a student allegedly said, “I love making Jews uncomfortable, especially with Hitler jokes.” In another, a student directly called the Jewish student a “stupid Jew.” OCR opened an investigation after receiving information from the Complainants about the continuing incidents.

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The continuing harassment is significant because the Brandeis Center, ADL and StandWithUs allege that the district's inadequate response to the original incidents left the hostile environment in place, allowing anti-Semitic conduct targeting the same victim to continue incident after incident. The Brandeis Center, ADL, and StandWithUs warned the district that Jewish students were being targeted during classes, between classes, during tests and other school activities and called for immediate action to protect Jewish students and prevent further harassment.

At AMDA, the [complaint](#) alleges that a Jewish student faced retaliation after she reported anti-Semitic harassment shortly after beginning studies at the performing arts college. After the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks, the student had a flyer glorifying violence against Jews deliberately placed under only her dorm room door, as the only openly Jewish student in her program. AMDA investigated and determined that several students had intentionally targeted the Jewish student. Despite that finding, AMDA imposed a mutual no-contact directive on both the Jewish student and the students responsible for the anti-Semitic incident. The directive thus imposed restrictions on the student who had reported the harassment as well as on the students AMDA had found responsible, placing additional burdens on the Jewish student and creating opportunities for her harassers to provoke her into violating the directive.

The complaint alleges that the perpetrators then weaponized the directive as a retaliatory and exclusionary tool to further isolate and ostracize the Jewish student. Rather than protecting the student from retaliation after she reported the anti-Semitic harassment, the complaint alleges that AMDA allowed the retaliation to continue and failed to punish the students for violating the directive. The complaint further alleges that the retaliation continued into the student's second year, when AMDA refused her request to keep the students responsible for the harassment away from her and later declined to discipline one of the students even after security footage confirmed that he had violated the directive.

According to the complaint, the retaliation included exclusion from a group chat created for all of the other students in the program where students disparaged her and made anti-Semitic comments, interference with friendships and academic partnerships, and repeated efforts to marginalize and harass the student. The complaint alleges that AMDA was repeatedly notified of the retaliation but failed to stop it. The hostile environment ultimately became so severe that the student withdrew from the school.

"Jewish students who report anti-Semitism should be protected and not forced to endure an avalanche of hate and retaliation while their education and mental health suffers," said **Hon. Kenneth L. Marcus, chairman and CEO of the Brandeis Center and the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education who ran the Office for Civil Rights during two administrations.** "We commend OCR for taking these allegations seriously. These investigations show that schools have an obligation to respond effectively and proactively when Jewish students speak up against the hate they encounter. When schools fail to respond to anti-Semitism, their silence sends a message that can cause hostile situations to worsen and retaliation to flourish, resulting in students being deprived of a normal educational experience."

"Blaming Jewish students for doing the right thing in speaking up when they are targeted must stop now," said **Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO and National Director.** "Jewish students deserve the same protection and safety that all other students deserve when attending school across the country. Educational institutions must take stronger stances in stopping antisemitic harassment and bullying as soon as the incidents are reported to leadership. We are encouraged by OCR's decision to investigate these matters and know that meaningful change can occur when educational institutions commit to steps to ensure that all Jewish students feel safe at educational institutions."

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“Equal educational access is a civil right that no student should ever be forced to compromise. When a school receives reports of antisemitism and fails to intervene, it violates federal law and deeply harms the community it is meant to protect,” said **Carly Gammill, Director of Legal Policy and Litigation at StandWithUs Saidoff Law**. “We welcome the decision by the Office for Civil Rights to investigate these failures—not just to enforce statutory compliance but also to repair broken trust and guarantee that our educational spaces remain secure and welcoming for everyone.”

Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color and national origin in educational institutions receiving federal funding and protects Jewish students from discrimination based on shared ancestry and ethnic characteristics. Federal civil rights protections also prohibit retaliation against students for reporting potential discrimination.

The Brandeis Center, ADL, and StandWithUs have asked OCR to require reforms designed to prevent similar treatment of Jewish students in the future, including stronger policies and procedures for addressing anti-Semitism and retaliation, improved training for administrators and staff, effective protections for students who report discrimination and measures to ensure schools respond promptly when Jewish students face hostile educational environments.

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#### **About The Brandeis Center**

*The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law is an independent, non-partisan, nonprofit corporation established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. LDB engages in research, education, and legal advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses, in the workplace, and elsewhere. It also empowers students by training them to understand their legal rights and educates administrators and employers on best practices to combat anti-Semitism. The Brandeis Center is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.*

#### **About ADL**

*ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913 to protect the Jewish people, ADL works to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment to all. In the face of rising antisemitism and extremism, we protect, advocate, and educate, through a mix of programs and services using the latest innovations and technology, and seek to create a world without hate. More at [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org).*

#### **About StandWithUs**

*StandWithUs (SWU) is a 25-year-old international non-partisan education organization that inspires people of all ages about Israel, challenges misinformation and fights against antisemitism. It takes legal action through StandWithUs Saidoff Law. It empowers hundreds of student leaders annually through its college Fellowship and high school Internship. SWU provides schools and educators with vital tools through its IsraelLINK middle school program, Holocaust Education Center, and K-12 Fairness Center. StandWithUs empowers people around the world to educate others through social media, print and digital materials in different languages, through educational programs and conferences, weekly newsletters, data and analytics, and missions to Israel. Founded in 2001 and headquartered in Los Angeles, StandWithUs has chapters throughout the U.S., Israel, Canada, the UK, Brazil, Argentina, the Netherlands, Australia and South Africa. [www.standwithus.com](http://www.standwithus.com)*

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