



CAIR



CAIR
NEW JERSEY

BACK TO SCHOOL RESOURCE GUIDE

2026-2027



CAIR

UNHOSTILE
Campus

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CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.

La misión de CAIR es proteger las libertades civiles, mejorar la comprensión del Islam, promover la justicia, y empoderar a los musulmanes en los Estados Unidos.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This report was written, edited, and designed by Aya Elamroussi and Dr. Maryam Hasan using a previous version created by Dina Sayedahmed with content assistance from others.

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Introduction

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, is proud to present the 2026-2027 Back to School Resource Guide to empower students and parents as they begin a new academic year. For decades, CAIR has worked to defend the rights of Muslim students, protect religious freedom, and ensure that schools are welcoming and supportive spaces for all children. In 2024, CAIR launched its Unhostile Campus Campaign aimed at fostering campus environments where students, faculty, and staff enjoy free speech and academic freedom. This resource guide is an expansion of the Unhostile Campus Campaign to K-12 schools.

Every new school year brings opportunities for growth and learning, but it can also bring challenges. Muslim students often face bullying, bias, Islamophobia, and unequal access to accommodations for their faith-based needs. This resource guide is designed to help families understand their rights, advocate for their children, and build strong partnerships with educators to create supportive school environments.

Whether it is ensuring fair treatment in the classroom, gaining access to prayer or dietary accommodations, or addressing incidents of bullying and discrimination, CAIR is here to stand with families every step of the way. We encourage parents, students, and community leaders to use this guide as a practical tool to protect their rights, to foster a positive educational experience, and to strengthen a sense of belonging in schools across the nation.

Together, we can help every Muslim student thrive, succeed, and have confidence in their identity.

Sincerely,
CAIR's Research and Advocacy Team



Your rights. Your voice. Your faith.

Muslim students may be challenged with...

- Limited or denied accommodations for prayer, holidays, or dietary needs
- Bullying, harassment, or targeting based on religious or cultural identity
- Administrators, faculty, or staff displaying cultural insensitivity
- Biased or inaccurate curriculum content, assignments, or classroom discussions
- Learning environments that exclude or marginalize Muslim students
- Social isolation or lack of belonging in school settings

As a student, you have the right to...

- Wear religious clothing or clothing with a religious message in the same manner as other similar messages are allowed
- Share information about your faith, distribute literature, and speak about religion, provided it is not disruptive
- Organize student-led prayers, including Friday congregational prayers, if they do not disrupt school activities
- Request release time for Friday prayers or other religious services
- Be excused for religious holidays or from activities that conflict with your beliefs
- Establish a Muslim student group on campus with provisions equal to those of other religious student groups
- Express political views that are non-disruptive and in a peaceful manner



CAIR supports you with...

- Providing advice on your options and rights
- Guiding you on how to advocate for yourself at school
- Assisting in filing complaints when administrators fail to act
- Connecting you with resources and guides to share with school officials

Download CAIR's...

[Know Your Rights Guides](#)

CAIR's Know Your Rights guides help Muslim students and families protect their religious freedom in schools. These guides are designed to ensure Muslim students feel safe, respected, and empowered in their learning environments.

[Guide to Bullying and Bias in Schools](#)

Muslim students face higher rates of bullying, bias, and isolation in schools. Over half of Muslim students in CAIR's research reported feeling unsafe or unwelcome at school. This guide helps turn those experiences into opportunities for protection, resilience, and advocacy. This guide gives families the tools to respond.

[Guidance for Students Speaking Out Against Islamophobia and for Palestinian Rights](#)

Students are reporting increasing cases of harassment, surveillance, and disciplinary actions for speaking out in support of Palestinian rights. CAIR's guide helps them respond safely, effectively, and confidently. CAIR provides expert advice for students and their families dealing with harassment or suppression while peacefully advocating for Palestinian human rights in school settings.

[Guidance for Students Targeted in Response to Palestine Rights Advocacy](#)

CAIR offers essential support for students and their families facing harassment or suppression while advocating for Palestinian rights in schools. CAIR encourages students experiencing interference, threats, or disciplinary

responses due to their advocacy or Muslim identity to reach out, report incidents, and get help.

[Ramadan Toolkit 2026](#)

CAIR's Ramadan Toolkit is a resource that Muslims can use to better navigate public schools and workplaces during Ramadan. It includes ready-to-use templates to request accommodations, to raise awareness, and promote policies for everyone. Using the templates makes it easier to communicate needs respectfully and effectively. Parents and students may use the toolkit to easily advocate for religious rights and contribute to a fulfilling educational experience.

[Eid Everywhere Toolkit](#)

CAIR's Eid Everywhere Toolkit is a practical advocacy guide designed to help parents, students, educators, and community members work with schools and districts to recognize and accommodate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The toolkit explains students' religious accommodation rights, provides step-by-step advocacy strategies, and includes ready-to-use template letters, resolutions, talking points, and FAQs for engaging school administrators and school boards. It is a valuable resource for families seeking to ensure Muslim students can observe Eid without academic penalties and to promote more inclusive school policies and calendars. Parents and students are encouraged to share this guide with teachers, principals, district leaders, and school board members to advance Eid recognition and accommodations in their communities.

[Muslim American Heritage Month Guide](#)

CAIR's Muslim-American Heritage Month Guide provides educators, administrators, and school communities with practical tools to recognize and celebrate the history, diversity, and contributions of Muslim Americans. The guide includes historical background, classroom-ready activities, facts about Muslim Americans, and profiles of influential Muslim figures in fields such as government, civil rights, science, medicine, sports, and the arts. It helps schools foster belonging, reduce bias, and integrate Muslim-American experiences into existing curriculum across history, civics, ELA, STEM, and the humanities. The guide can also serve as a valuable advocacy tool for parents and students seeking greater representation and inclusion in their schools, and can be shared with teachers, principals, school boards, and district leaders to support Muslim-American Heritage Month observances and culturally responsive learning opportunities.

Guidance on Challenging Topics

25th Anniversary of 9/11 and Tools for Classrooms

As educators approach the 25th anniversary of September 11th attack on our nation, it is important to teach this tragic moment in American history with accuracy and empathy.

Comprehensive lesson plans would address the 9/11 attack itself, the victims and families impacted, and the aftermath of the attack, such as the war in Afghanistan, changes in national security, and the rise in hate crimes and discrimination against American Muslim and perceived-Muslim communities.

NOTE: An earlier version of the document did not go through proper vetting and included a link to a primary source document that was removed in November 2025. CAIR believes in referring readers to primary source documents but in this instance, we believe that certain documents—such as primary documents related to the 9/11 perpetrators—are best reviewed at the post K-12 level and in full context with other documents such as the Fatwa Against Terrorism, the 2014 Letter to Bagdadi which lies out widespread scholarly rejection of Al Qaeda and ISIS's interpretation of the faith, and the 9/11 Commission Report itself.

Issues related to Muslims, Arabs, Jews, Palestinians, and others against genocide

Schools serve as environments where students from diverse backgrounds learn about the world and acquire the skills to become informed citizens. The continued violence faced by the Muslim, Arab, Jewish, Palestinian communities, and others, particularly in recent years, has ignited worldwide discussions, including within educational settings. CAIR educates the community by providing tips for parents and educators, reasons for discussion, and ways to create space for open dialogue.

Talking to Young Children About Gaza

Children see and hear about Gaza, and they deserve safe, honest, and age-appropriate conversations. CAIR encourages parents and educators to provide compassionate guidance rooted in dignity and justice when students ask about this topic or if lesson plans address this topic. Tips for parents and educators include:

- Listen first by letting children share what they've heard or felt and by asking them:
- "Can you tell me what you've heard about what's happening in Gaza?"
- "What questions do you have?"
- "How did that make you feel?"
- "Is there anything you're worried or confused about?"
- "Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you shared your thoughts with me."

Affirm emotions:

Validate sadness, fear, or confusion.

- "It's okay to feel sad when we hear that people are suffering."
- "Many people feel upset or confused when they see difficult news."
- "Your feelings matter, and it's okay to ask questions."
- "I can understand why that would make you feel worried."
- "You're not alone—I'm here to talk whenever you need to."

Speak clearly:

Use simple, age-appropriate language to explain injustice and human rights.

- For younger children (approximately ages 5–8):
- "Many children want the same things you do—to be safe, go to school, play, and be with their families."
- "Everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and dignity."
- For older children (approximately ages 9–12):
- "People may have different opinions about why this is happening, but we can all agree that all children deserve safety and protection."
- "Human rights are basic rights that belong to every person, no matter where they live or who they are."
- "It's important to learn from reliable sources and ask questions when something is confusing."



Promote values:

Emphasize fairness, nonviolence, and equality for all.

- "We believe every person's life has equal value."
- "It's important to care about people who are suffering, wherever they live."
- "Even when people disagree, we should treat others with respect and reject hatred."
- "Kindness, compassion, and standing up for fairness are values we can practice every day."
- "We can care about everyone's safety and well-being."

Offer action:

Encourage small, meaningful responses—such as prayer, kindness, or community support—that give children a sense of agency.

- "Would you like to make a card, draw a picture, or write a message of hope?"
- "Let's think of one way we can help others in our own community too."
- "Even small acts of kindness remind us that we can make a positive difference."
- By centering compassion and truth, families can help children process difficult realities while building resilience, empathy, and pride in their identity.

Why talk about foreign issues in school?

Preventing students from discussing difficult topics can sometimes make students feel confused and powerless, especially if they rely on unreliable online sources. Parents and teachers can play a supportive role by fostering safe and welcoming environments. They can also share helpful skills that inspire students to engage in conversations with empathy and understanding, creating a more open and caring space for everyone.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR OPEN DIALOGUE.

- **Ground discussions in facts:** Provide accurate information about the realities of events in Gaza as documented by the United Nations and recognized international human rights organizations
- **Facilitate respectful dialogue:** Set aside time for students to share their perspectives while making clear that targeted bigotry or harassment will not be tolerated and will carry consequences.
- **Protect free expression:** Ensure students are not penalized or stigmatized for expressing support for Palestinian human rights and do not conflate peaceful advocacy for Palestinian freedom with supporting terrorism or antisemitism.
- **Promote understanding:** Encourage students to explore key terms that may arise in lesson plans or that students may raise, such as "apartheid", "genocide", and "terrorism", through the lens of international law and U.S. law.
- **Center universal values:** Highlight the rejection of hate against any group as the foundation for discussion.

Email Request Templates

Prayer accommodations

Copy and paste the text below to use CAIR's email template for requesting afternoon and/or Friday prayer accommodations from your child's school. Insert your information where applicable.

[DATE]

PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT

SCHOOL NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

EMAIL | PHONE

RE: Prayer Accommodation Request

Dear [PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT]:

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am the parent of [STUDENT NAME], grade [NUMBER], at [SCHOOL NAME]. I am requesting accommodation for my child to be excused briefly during the early afternoon to pray in a quiet and respectful place at school.

As you know, federal and state law require schools to provide reasonable accommodations for students' sincerely held religious practices. Across the country, districts regularly accommodate Muslim students for prayer, religious attire, meal needs, fasting during Ramadan, and attendance on Friday for congregational prayers.

(REQUEST TO LEAVE SCHOOL FOR FRIDAY PRAYER OPTION)

I request that my child be granted temporary leave, from the school's premises, with [NAME OF PERSON(S)] to attend Friday afternoon congregational prayer at our local Islamic center. Please allow this momentary leave for Friday Jummah prayer to be recorded by the school as an excused absence. My child would leave the school from [X:XX AM/PM] and return at [X:XX AM/PM], to pray in accordance with [his/her] sincerely held religious beliefs. Alternatively, the school may allow Muslim students on campus to hold their own Friday congregational prayer on campus.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can work together to provide these accommodations while maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

EMAIL | PHONE

Email Request Templates

Uniform or dress code accommodations

Copy and paste the text below to use CAIR's email template for requesting uniform or dress code accommodations from your child's school. Insert your information where applicable.

[DATE]
PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT
SCHOOL NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

RE: Uniform or Dress Code Accommodation Request

Dear [PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT]:

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am the parent of [STUDENT NAME], a [GRADE] student at [SCHOOL NAME]. I am requesting accommodation for my child to be excused from uniform or dress code requirements to observe religious beliefs in attire.

The U.S. Department of Education has made it clear that schools may not prohibit or single out students for wearing religious attire. If exceptions to a dress code are made for nonreligious reasons, comparable exceptions must also be made for religious practice. Students also retain the right to display religious messages on clothing, just as they may display nonreligious messages.

I appreciate your cooperation in ensuring that my child can freely practice their faith while fully participating in the school community. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can work together to provide these accommodations while maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]

ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

Email Request Templates

Excuse from music/art/sex education classes

Copy and paste the text below to use CAIR's email template for requesting an excuse from music, art, or sex education classes. Insert your information where applicable.

[DATE]
PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT
SCHOOL NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

RE: Excuse from [SUBJECT] Class Request

Dear [PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT]:

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am the parent of [STUDENT NAME], a [GRADE] student at [SCHOOL NAME]. I am requesting accommodation for my child to be excused from [SUBJECT] education class to observe our family's sincerely held religious or moral beliefs. As you are aware, the U.S. Department of Education guidance confirms that parents have the right to request accommodations when instruction conflicts with their sincerely held religious or moral beliefs.

I respectfully request that my child be provided with alternative assignments that are consistent with our faith traditions. I also ask that this request be met with the dignity and respect afforded to all families seeking accommodations.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in supporting my child's educational success while respecting our family's sincerely held beliefs. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]

ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

Email Request Templates

Dietary restrictions accommodations

Copy and paste the text below to use CAIR's email template for requesting dietary restrictions accommodations from your child's school. Insert your information where applicable.

[DATE]
PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT
SCHOOL NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

RE: Dietary Restrictions Accommodations Request

Dear [PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT],

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am the parent of [STUDENT NAME], a [GRADE] student at [SCHOOL NAME]. I am writing to formally request dietary accommodations for my child in accordance with their sincerely held religious beliefs.

As a Muslim student, my child follows dietary restrictions that prohibit the consumption of pork, pork by-products, and non-halal meat. The U.S. Department of Education and federal law require schools to provide reasonable accommodations so that all students have equal access to meals without being forced to compromise their faith.

I respectfully request that my child be provided with appropriate meal alternatives, such as vegetarian, vegan, or halal-certified options, whenever standard school meals do not meet these requirements. If halal meals are not available, we request that the school provide vegetarian options consistently, ensuring my child has reliable access to nutritious meals each day.

I also request that school staff be informed about these dietary restrictions to prevent any confusion or inadvertent errors in meal service.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Please confirm that these accommodations can be provided. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

Email Request Templates

FERPA Records Parent Meeting Request

Copy and paste the text below to request a meeting with school officials and access to your child's education records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Insert your information where applicable.

[DATE]
PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT
SCHOOL NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

RE: FERPA Request for Education Records and Parent Meeting

Dear [PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT]:

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am the parent/guardian of [STUDENT NAME], a [GRADE] student at [SCHOOL NAME]. I am writing to request a meeting with appropriate school officials and access to my child's education records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Under FERPA, parents and eligible students have the right to inspect and review education records maintained by the school. I respectfully request copies of, or access to review, records related to [DESCRIBE RECORDS REQUESTED, such as attendance, disciplinary records, incident reports, communications, counseling notes, accommodation requests, grades, evaluations, or other school records].

I also request a meeting with [PRINCIPAL/COUNSELOR/TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR] to discuss these records, any concerns related to my child's education or school experience, and any appropriate next steps. Please provide available meeting times within the next [NUMBER] school days.

Please confirm receipt of this request and let me know the process and timeline for reviewing or receiving the requested records. Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with the school to support my child's educational success.

Sincerely,

[PARENT NAME]
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE
EMAIL | PHONE

A Message from CAIR to Muslim Students

As you begin a new school year, we want you to remember one thing: **you belong.**

At CAIR, our mission is to protect civil rights, empower American Muslims, and promote justice and mutual understanding. We believe every Muslim student deserves to learn in an environment where they feel safe, respected, and valued, not despite their faith, but with their faith and identity fully embraced.

Know Your Rights

Read and understand CAIR's Know Your Rights Guides. Knowing your rights is one of the first steps toward becoming a confident and empowered advocate for yourself and your community. Share these resources with friends, classmates, and family members so they can better understand their rights, too.

Be Proud of Who You Are

Your identity is a source of strength. Muslim Americans have made significant contributions to our nation in science, medicine, education, public service, business, athletics, the arts, and beyond. You are part of that story. Do not be afraid to bring your full self into the classroom. Your voice, experiences, and perspective enrich your school community and help build understanding among your peers.

Build Bridges and Community

School is an opportunity to learn, grow, and build meaningful relationships. Look for ways to engage with classmates, teachers, clubs, student organizations, and service opportunities. By leading with kindness, confidence, and character, you can help create a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Speak Up When Something Is Wrong

If you experience bullying, harassment, discrimination, or exclusion because of your faith or identity, know that you are not alone. Talk to a trusted adult, counselor, teacher, or parent, and seek support when needed. CAIR is here to help you navigate challenges, protect your rights, and advocate for fair treatment in schools. Reach out to CAIR for support.

You Are the Future

The next generation of Muslim leaders, educators, scientists, artists, public servants, and changemakers is sitting in today's classrooms. Your education matters. Your dreams matter. Your voice matters. As you begin this school year, walk into your classroom with confidence, take pride in your identity, and know that CAIR stands with you every step of the way.



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