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# Echoes & Reflections

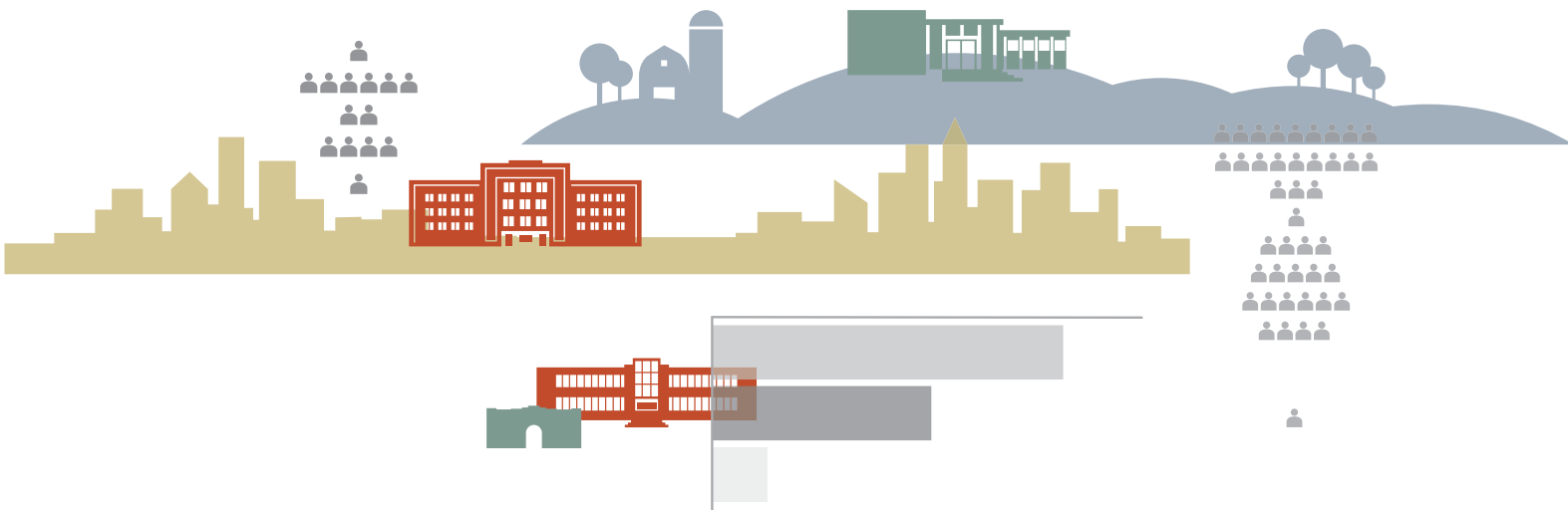
## Contemporary Antisemitism Study

Does exposure to contemporary antisemitism lessons contribute positively to the way students think about, and interact with, the world around them in ways that counteract antisemitism?

Although the Holocaust ended more than seven decades ago, antisemitism did not end with it. In fact, incidences of antisemitism, including violent attacks, are increasing in the United States and generally. Over the years, the causes and manifestations of antisemitism have changed in response to dynamic socio-political, economic, and religious contexts. With its deep historical roots even prior to the Holocaust, antisemitism remains a persistent source of bias and hatred in our world today.

In response, the national Holocaust education program, Echoes & Reflections, a partnership of ADL, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem, developed the [Gringlas Unit on Contemporary Antisemitism](#) (the *Gringlas Unit*) as a three-part teaching resource for high school educators with the following general learning objectives:

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to understand that antisemitism did not end after the Holocaust. Students will learn about the persistence of antisemitism worldwide and analyze the different types of contemporary antisemitism that are present in society today. These include classical and newer forms of antisemitism as well as new forms based on old ideas. Students will also be introduced to individuals who refuse to be bystanders to antisemitism as they consider the responsibility of all members of society to respond to and prevent antisemitism and all forms of bigotry.



To assess the contribution of Echoes & Reflections' resources to these desired outcomes among U.S. high school students who received the *Gringlas Unit*, Echoes & Reflections contracted Lucid Collaborative to undertake an evaluation of a sample of schools, and their teachers and students, between Summer 2022 and Spring 2023.

The importance of this study lies in the need to better understand the outcomes of teaching U.S. high school students about contemporary antisemitism in a world in which incidents of antisemitic hate and prejudice are rising. Understanding and implementing effective education methods will better prepare students and young adults to recognize and counter antisemitism and other forms of hate within their communities and wider society.

The results are positive. Findings reveal that lessons on contemporary antisemitism increase students' knowledge of the Holocaust and raise awareness of contemporary antisemitism in its different manifestations, cultivate students' empathy towards victims of antisemitic attacks and other forms of bias and hate, and ignite students' intention to educate others and take action against antisemitism when they encounter it. Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that these positive outcomes can be attributable to students' experiences with the *Gringlas Unit*.

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## Approach and Methodology

The research team undertook a mixed method multiple case study approach to assess the efficacy of lessons in contemporary antisemitism on students in three rural and three urban U.S. high schools. The desired outcomes of the lessons include gaining knowledge of the Holocaust and awareness of contemporary antisemitism, facilitating the development of empathetic attitudes towards victims of antisemitism, gaining perspective more generally on the plight of vulnerable and marginalized individuals, and strengthening students' motivation and capacity to stand up to antisemitic behavior.

This approach involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from students and educators to provide a general understanding of program outcomes. The quantitative phase included a pre- and post-program assessment using a survey with validated and original scales

to measure students' advancement in cognitive, social-emotional learning, and behavioral outcomes through multiple choice questions. It also included a general assessment of students' opinions of the lessons and their effect in their lives. The qualitative phase involved classroom observations and in-depth conversations with teachers and students to explore their experiences, perceptions, and the contextual factors influencing the lessons' effects on their educational journey.

By triangulating findings from multiple data sources, this mixed methods study provides a richer, nuanced, and comprehensive assessment of the efficacy of the lessons on contemporary antisemitism. It sheds light on students' performance in different quantitative scales and also delves into participants' lived experiences and subjective perspectives.

## Description of High Schools in the Sample Key Institutional Characteristics

**Orange** represents the schools located in **urban** areas; **Green**, those that are **rural**.

	Ashwood	Brownhill	Creekside	Dearfield	Everlane	Fairview
Requirement of Holocaust Education	2021	2021	2015	1996	2021	No Mandate
Region	Midwest	Southwest	Southeastern	Northeastern	Northeastern	Central Eastern
Enrollment (Number of Students)	392	2,323	1,909	105	532	691
Ranking (State)	322	149	105	261	27	4
Teacher-Student Ratio	16:1	20:1	14:1	11:1	12:1	16:1
Graduation Rate	100%	75%	96%	94%	85%	99%
Minority Enrollment (Public information)	23%	71.2%	47.2%	0%	10.5%	96.4%
% of Non-White students (Study)	44%	80%	35%	9%	0%	79%
Magnet School	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

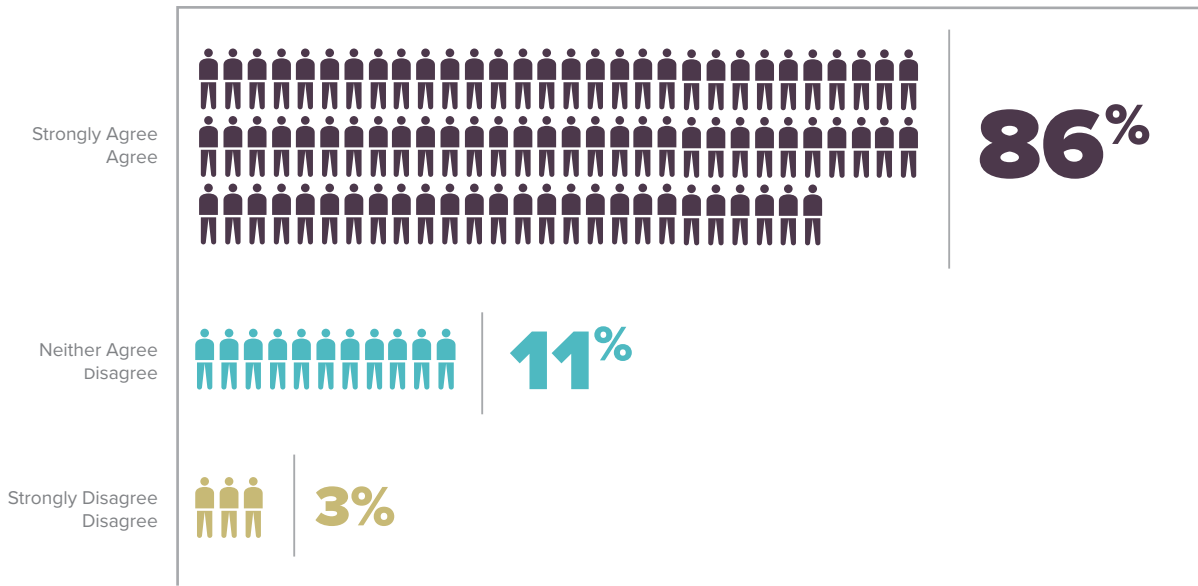
Source: <https://www.usnews.com/education/> and [www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org). Last visited on October 30, 2023.

# Findings

A significant majority of students report **that the lessons made them more aware of examples of antisemitism around them in a way they did not see before.** For example, 86% of students –approximately 4 out of 5 students – strongly agree or agree that after the lessons they are more aware of examples of antisemitism when they occur.

**Post-Lessons:** I am now more aware of examples of antisemitism when they occur.

## AWARENESS



*“I think one of the things I will remember [from the lessons] is how antisemitism is so current even today, and before these lessons I would never think twice about something like that and now I think more about it when I hear or see something because I know more of how it used to affect people and how it still affects people.”*



*“I’m definitely more aware. Like before when I saw, when I saw those Nazi symbols in the bathroom, I just thought, oh, it’s just the seventh and eighth graders or a freshman or somebody just trying to play a dumb stupid joke. At first I was like, I literally just ignored it and half the time I didn’t even notice it. Cause I just didn’t know anything about any of it. And now I know a lot more about it. I see it, now I’m like, wow, that’s kind of messed up.”*

Students also report that, after the lessons, they have a **better understanding of how antisemitism is interrelated with other forms of prejudice**. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that the *Gringlas Unit* helped them to see the connections between antisemitism and other forms of bias and hatred.



*“ I have experienced this feeling, not because I am a Jew, but because I understand that it isn’t fair even for other people. For instance, racism is still going on and it’s been over 400 years. It [the lesson] compels me because I am a black male and I have experienced that hatred or that animosity because of the after-effects of slavery.”*

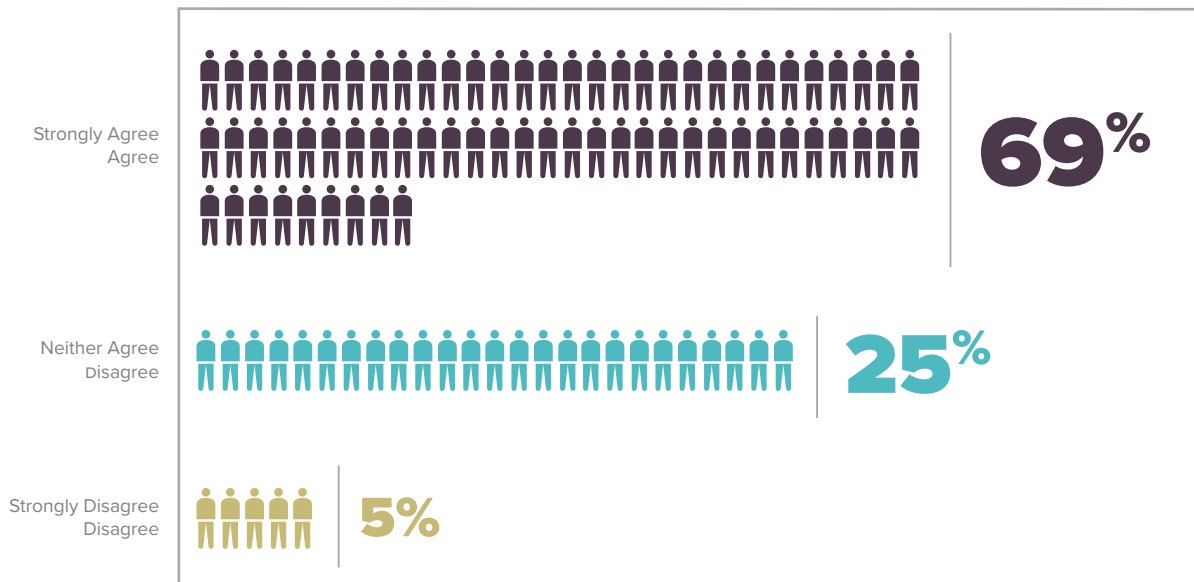


*“They [the lessons] made me much more aware of what is being said around me and how I can spot hate, not just antisemitism.”*

After the lessons on contemporary antisemitism, more than two-thirds of students (69%) report that they **now know how to challenge antisemitism when they encounter it**. A strong majority of students also feel that they can **respond effectively to antisemitism and other forms of hate in their community (73%), and are motivated to challenge antisemitism** when they encounter it (72%).

**Post-Lessons:** I know how to challenge antisemitism when I encounter it.

## KNOW HOW TO CHALLENGE



**Sixty-nine percent (69%) of students** strongly agree or agree about knowing how to challenge antisemitism when they encounter it. However, students' **levels of awareness (85.7%) are higher than their knowledge on how to challenge antisemitism (69.8%).**



*"It opened my eyes and made me want to take action to see how antisemitism affects communities and how to stop it."*



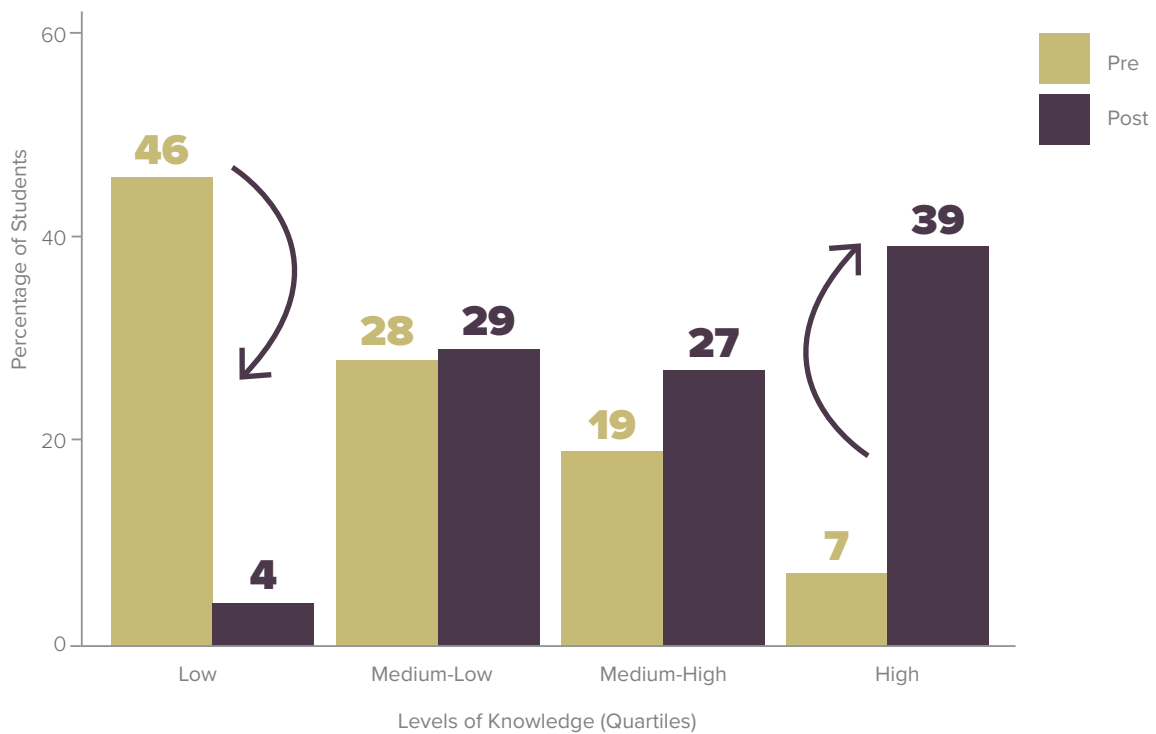
*"They [the lessons] will influence me in causing me to stand up against discrimination and hate when I see it in person."*

The comparison between **quantitative scales in the pre- and post-surveys** reveal several statistically significant results.

- **The general results of the Knowledge of the Holocaust and Antisemitism Scale are prevalent across all six schools and showed statistically significant improvement.** This scale asked students how much they know about 1) the Holocaust; 2) Antisemitism; 3) How antisemitism affected people in the past; 4) How antisemitism affects people today; 5) How antisemitism relates to them personally; 6) How to recognize antisemitism when it occurs, and, 7) How to stand up to antisemitic behavior. At all schools, the mean level of score increased after participating in the *Gringlas Unit* lessons. In Ashwood High School, the mean increased from 8 to 14; in Brownhill High School the mean score increased from 13 to 16; in Creekside High School, the mean increased from 9 to 16; in Dearfield High School, the mean increased from 11 to 16; in Everlane High School, the mean increased from 13 to 20; and in Fairview High School, the mean increased from 6 to 17.

### Knowledge of the Holocaust and Antisemitism Scale (Categorical).

Pre- and Post-Survey Results. General Report



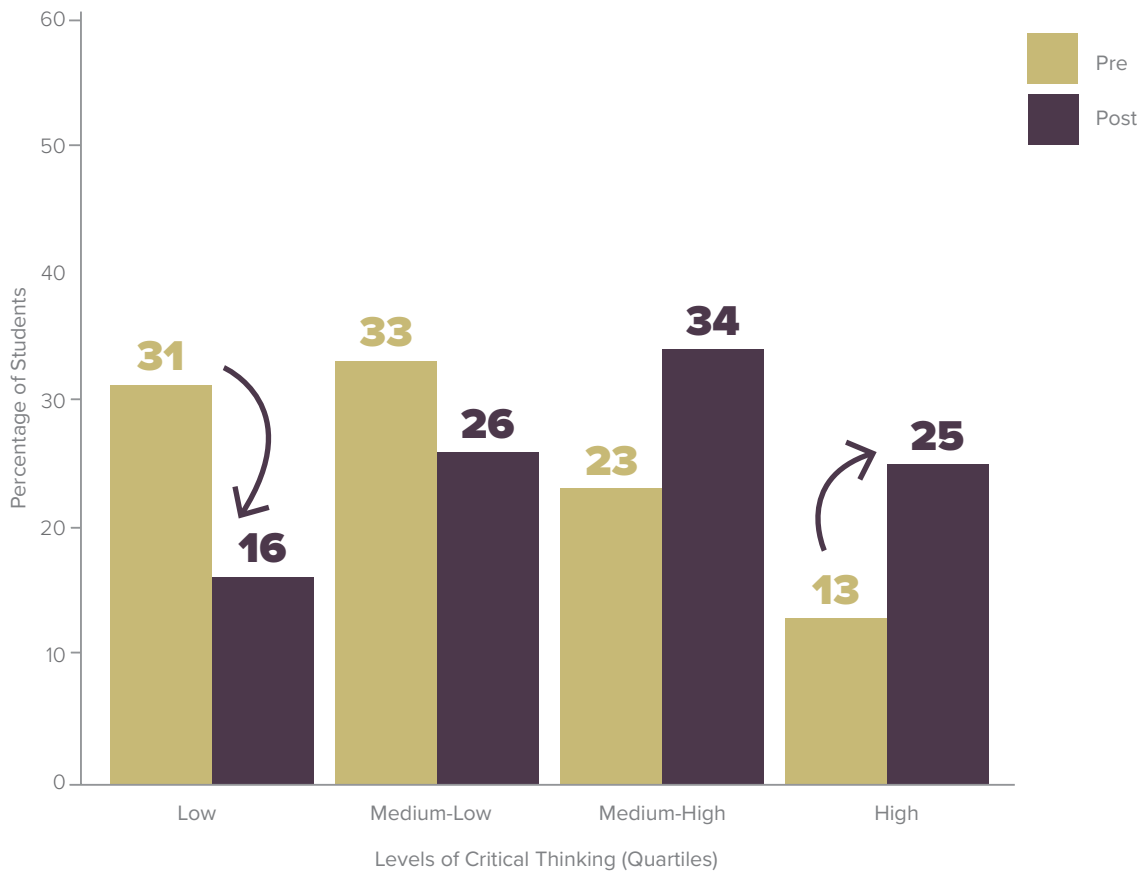
*"I now understand the effects the Holocaust and antisemitism still has on Jewish people. I didn't think it was still such a large hate, but now I understand how it started, continues, and how hopefully I can hope to end it."*

*"It [the Gringlas Unit lessons] affected me personally because I had never thought too deeply about present day examples of antisemitism and how prevalent it is in society. Also, how antisemitism is interconnected with other forms of hate."*



- Although progress varies by school, **students also show heightened levels of critical thinking that are statistically significant at the aggregate level.** The Critical Thinking Scale is a composite scale of eight items aimed at measuring students' self-perceived capacity to objectively analyze and use new information, use different resources to make informed decisions, maintain openness to new ideas, question their own assumptions, evaluate evidence, and think logically to reach well-considered conclusions. The percentage of students who scored poorly on the critical thinking scale in the pre-survey decreased by more than 50% after exposure to the *Gringlas Unit* lessons, and the percentage of students scoring highly almost doubled.

### Critical Thinking Scale (Categorical). Pre- and Post-Survey Results. General Report



*“People these days that deny the Holocaust ever happened are antisemitic because the Holocaust has been documented and recorded, and to not believe that just amazes me because there are people alive who witnessed it and to deny that is just outright rude and disrespectful and it can create more antisemitic things to happen, which is not good.”*

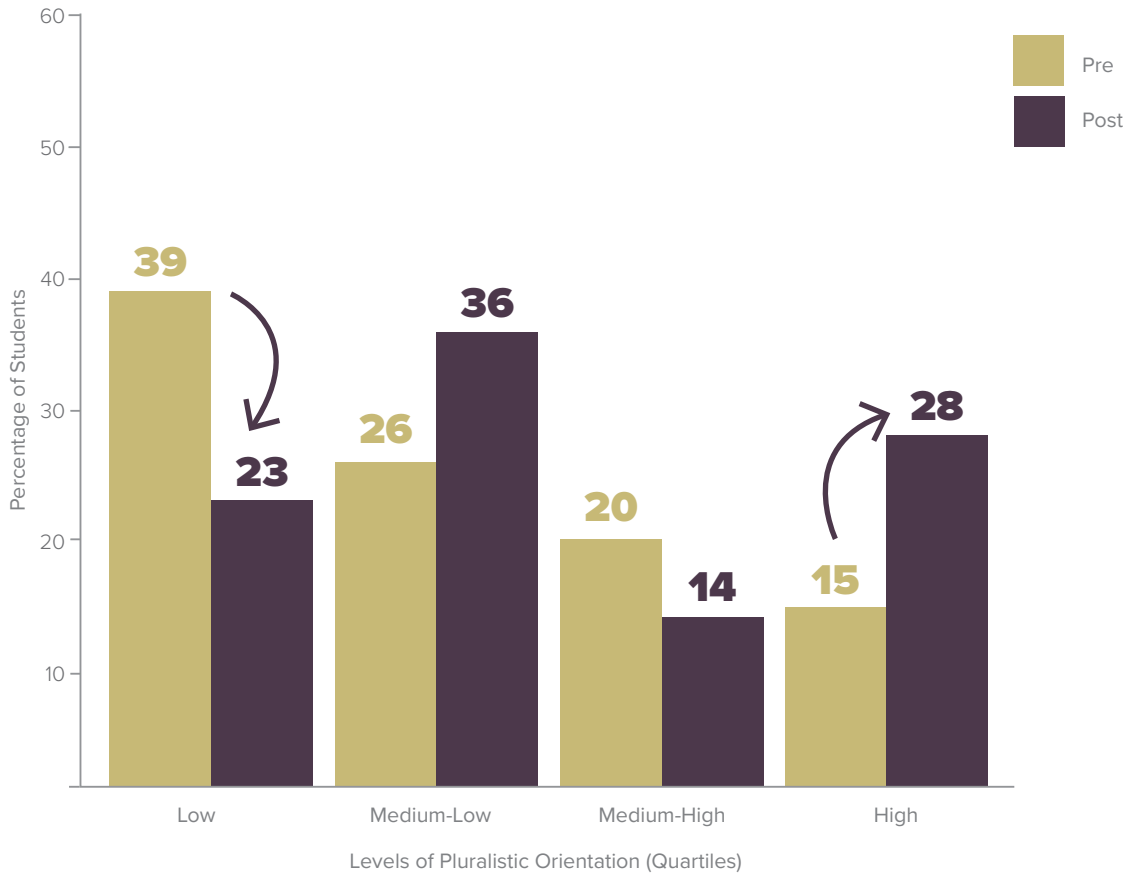
*“[The lessons] made me rethink what other people go through and that even if they seem ok they may not be.”*





- After lessons on contemporary antisemitism, **students report a statistically significant increase in willingness to embrace an open and diverse society.** The Pluralistic Orientation Scale is a validated composite scale of five items aimed at measuring students’ self-reported ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective, tolerance regarding others’ beliefs, openness to having their own views challenged, and ability to discuss difficult issues and work cooperatively with others. While results are variable among schools, the overall results are positive.

### Pluralistic Orientation (Categorical). Pre- and Post-Survey Results. General Report



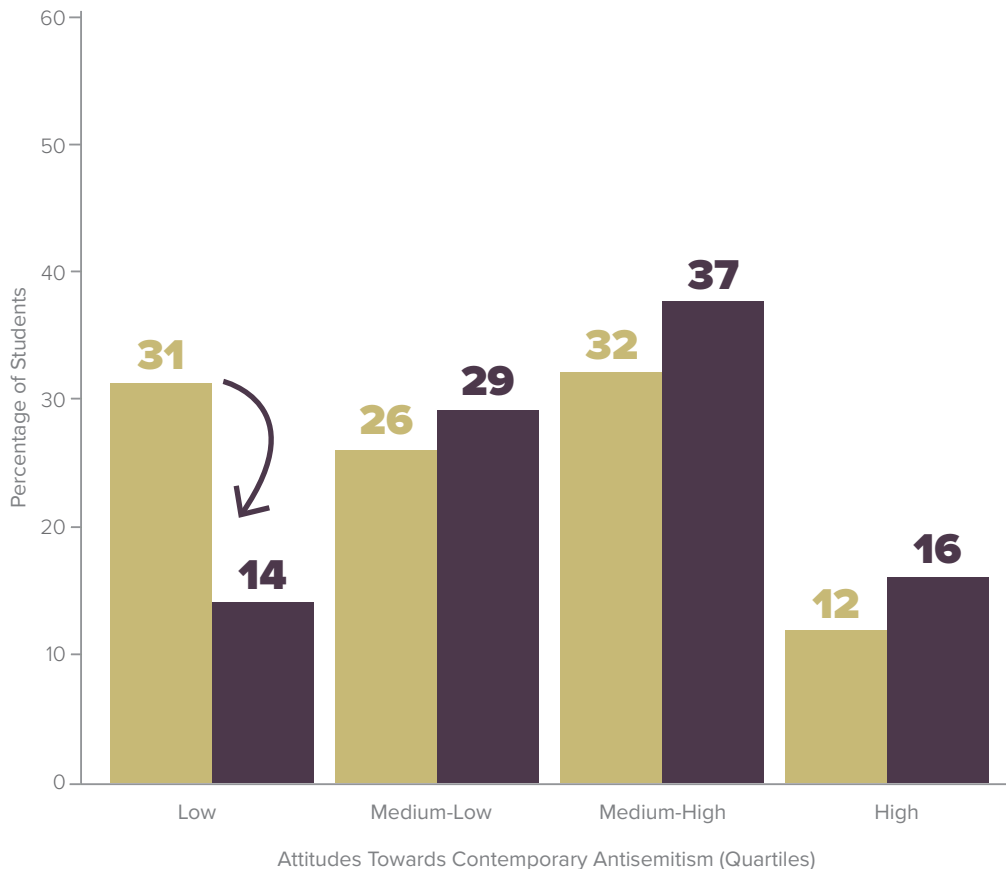
*“Well, [the lessons] introduced me to the perspectives of those who went through it and made me realize that I definitely wouldn’t want it to happen again, therefore, I would be willing to speak up and educate others who disagree with me.”*

*“It makes me want to study more about different forms of discrimination and be more aware of the current geopolitical world. This lesson on antisemitism has made me more aware of mass injustices against marginalized groups.”*

- After exposure to the *Gringlas Unit* lessons, students demonstrated stronger engagement with the *Unit's* key learning objectives that were statistically significant. The Attitudes towards Contemporary Antisemitism Scale is an original composite scale of five items aimed at measuring students' self-reported levels of interest in understanding current events, agreement on the contemporary relevance of the events of the Holocaust, recognition of antisemitism as a problem in contemporary society, interest in historical events in general, and consideration of antisemitism as a problem that extends beyond Jewish people.

## Attitudes Towards Contemporary Antisemitism (Categorical).

Pre- and Post-Survey Results. General Report




*“For me, it has been, like, certain things I used to do or say that I didn’t think were offensive, well I learned in this class that they were offensive. Like I just told my friends and myself not to do in that kind of way. You may not mean any harm, but you may cause harm to other people.”*



*“[The lessons] made me realize that things need to change in the world and if you are educated about history you can prevent it in the future.”*


However, students' socioeconomic status, political views, and sexual orientation can have a mediating effect on students' social-emotional engagement with the lessons. For example, in the Attitudes towards Contemporary Antisemitism Scale the engagement of students from middle and upper middle class backgrounds is higher than the engagement of students from lower and working class backgrounds. Additionally, moderate, liberal, and LGBTQ students score higher than conservative and straight students. These differences are statistically significant.

Across urban and rural schools, students agree that the *Gringlas Unit* had significantly raised their awareness of contemporary antisemitic behavior in the comments and actions of their schoolmates, in media more generally, and in their community. A frequent description of these lessons is that they were truly **eye-opening**. Most students report having little knowledge about the Holocaust and contemporary antisemitism and limited exposure to Jewish culture prior to the lessons.




*“One takeaway is that people go through things like this all over the world, like all different kinds of people, like all different types of religion and races. Like my environment really doesn’t expose me to that much antisemitism. But me reading about other people’s problems and other things, like it kind of opened my mind to different problems in the world other than just my problems or the problems in my environment.”*

Students also manifest their empathy and express a range of emotions, such as anger and consternation, upon learning about recent antisemitic events in the U.S.



*“This [Gringlas] unit made me kind of realize how sheltered I’ve been from a lot of this... I feel like I’ve just been in a little bubble where any of this didn’t really affect me in this little community that I am in... I just didn’t realize how big it is still going on today... I didn’t realize how just absolutely terrible it is.”*



*“Another one of my take aways is the fact that there’s a lot of hatred towards Jewish people still to this day. Me personally, I didn’t think there was much of it ‘cause I don’t, in my community there’s, we don’t see it. I’m not really around Jewish people, but in our lessons we learned how, in 2022 or 2021, the highest [hate] crime rate was towards Jewish people... That was really shocking to me that people were still carrying on today with that.”*

In addition, most students recognize the moral value of standing up against antisemitic behavior and express their willingness to take proactive measures against antisemitism.



*“I realized I need to stand up more to hate and I have a better view of what antisemitism hate can look like and how to stop it.”*



*“These lessons opened my eyes to the ways hate still is present in today’s time. Not only that, but reading about how youth leaders that are my age, who are fighting antisemitism, made me realize how important the youth are to a better future.”*

- Analysis of qualitative data reveal that some students proudly report on instances in which they confronted inappropriate comments and antisemitic behavior, demonstrating an assertive approach to addressing difficult situations.




*“So far I have already confronted someone who made inappropriate comments about the Holocaust and antisemitism so I think knowing more about it will continue to strengthen my ability to stand up against harsh and inappropriate comments made about this topic.”*

Across all schools, students said that the most challenging aspect of the fight against antisemitism lies in having the confidence to respond to it effectively and having the proper skills and strategies **to take action and stand up to antisemitic behavior**. As students comment, confronting their peers requires courage and may involve the risk of sacrificing their own safety, reputation, or social standing on behalf of the victims. Being an ally makes students vulnerable and involves the risk of becoming a target for bullying behavior. **The combination of peer pressure, the desire for social acceptance, and the fear of retaliation creates a challenging environment to speak out against antisemitism and other forms of hate and discrimination, even when students are aware of and empathize with the victims.**




*“I think confrontation in general is very scary. So I feel a lot of people hesitate even though... they would love to confront someone. I think the idea of stepping up and being one-on-one with another person is very scary. And I think that’s where a lot of hesitation happens.”*




*“I think ‘standing up’ in general is very isolating ‘cause you are the only one who sees the issue and is willing to confront it. So I feel like being the only one out of the group to stand up is very isolating and also basically making you the new target.”*

**The stakes to fight antisemitism appear to be higher for students in rural high schools compared to their urban counterparts.** In two of the rural schools, students have directly encountered prejudiced comments and incidents of antisemitism, bias and hate in their schools, families, and/or communities. A palpable frustration stems from the dissonance students perceive between the values of their families and community against the values fostered by the *Gringlas Unit*. A group of students in two of these high schools expressed their despair at living in what they described as narrow-minded communities, where they consider that the burden of racism, bigotry and prejudice has been passed down through generations.




*“I feel disappointed by my community and how hateful it can really be to other groups.”*



*“Hate is taught. [This town] is a very close-minded community where bigotry flourishes because no one holds people accountable for what they say/do. [This town] is not safe for everyone. It is important to make everyone feel safe and important.”*

- **However, a long history Holocaust and genocide education has demonstrated having a transformative effect in one rural community.** Evidence from the third rural school points to the positive influence of more than two decades of Holocaust and genocide education in shaping an intergenerational commitment to confront antisemitism. The long legacy of Holocaust and genocide education in this area contrasts with the other two rural schools where this education has only recently been mandated. According to students, there is significant support among their families and friends for their participation in the school’s Holocaust and Genocide Studies course. Similarly, according to the teacher, there is a history of Holocaust education in the community that encourages families and students to believe in the lessons and in what the school does. In her words: *“Parents feel that this [the lessons] provide information that it is very important for their kids to know.”* It is plausible that the results from this school are manifesting more long-term outcomes from generations of students’ learning about antisemitism **and may serve as a model for other schools.**



*“I just feel like if more people got to learn about it, they might be prone to not be violent about it. And I just feel that a lot of people who are making [antisemitic] comments are just uneducated about what happened.”*

The *Gringlas Unit* goes beyond Holocaust and antisemitism education, for it has also become a resource for students seeking guidance and support when confronting incidents of hate. Educators can play a crucial role in students' lives once they have gained awareness and understanding of contemporary antisemitism and other forms of hate and prejudice. According to each of the teachers in the study, after the *Gringlas Unit*, students become better able to recognize and morally condemn antisemitic incidents or hateful events that occurred within their school or communities. Students openly report and discuss these events with their teachers. This emphasizes the *Gringlas Unit's* capacity to serve as a significant resource and platform, providing valuable guidance and support to students.

## Conclusion

Both quantitative and qualitative results from this study show that the Echoes & Reflections *Gringlas Unit on Contemporary Antisemitism* can contribute substantively to cultivating a deep understanding of the Holocaust and fostering a keen awareness of contemporary antisemitism in its various manifestations amongst high school students. The *Unit* goes beyond cognitive gains however; it also instills empathy among students for those who have suffered from antisemitic attacks, bias, and prejudice and motivates students to take

a stand against hate. Despite differences in backgrounds, contexts, ages, life situations, and communities, the lessons opened students' eyes to the harms of antisemitism. The critical step from intermediate outcomes of knowledge, attitudes, and intentions to more transformative outcomes of behavior change are likely to require additional research and course development aimed at building the capacity of students for future justice-oriented civic engagement.



*"The acts of antisemitism and discrimination affected me because I firmly believe that no human should have to endure that treatment ever."*



*"Everyone has a responsibility to speak out against this hate because we all have a voice."*



*"Tolerating antisemitism is antisemitism."*

For inquiries, contact Echoes & Reflections at [info@echoesandreflections.org](mailto:info@echoesandreflections.org).

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