

HOLOCAUST  
INSTRUCTION IN NYS  
PUBLIC SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS



New York State Education Department

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# HOLOCAUST INSTRUCTION IN NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

*A Report on Findings from the Fall 2022 survey of New York State public school districts regarding instruction on the Holocaust within the state.*

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## Executive Summary

The requirement that New York State public school districts instruct their students about the Holocaust is found in Education Law S 801. The New York State Social Studies Learning Standards provide for the implementation of this requirement by requiring instruction in the Holocaust and other human rights atrocities. Instruction about the Holocaust is incorporated throughout the K-12 Social Studies Framework, the guide districts use to develop curriculum and on which the NYS Social Studies Regents Examinations are based. The Framework specifies the Holocaust as essential curriculum content in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade social studies courses.

In August 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul signed a series of bills aimed at honoring and supporting Holocaust survivors, one of which directed the Commissioner of Education to conduct a survey regarding instruction of the Holocaust within New York State school districts<sup>1</sup>. The survey was developed by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and sent to school district superintendents with a deadline for submission by November 10, 2022.

**Responses to the survey show that 100% of districts with secondary students teach the Holocaust at the middle and high school levels.** In addition, most districts feature instructional programming focused on the Holocaust beyond that which is required by Education Law and the New York State Learning Standards.

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<sup>1</sup> "Governor Hochul Signs Legislation to Honor and Support Holocaust Survivors in Educational, Cultural, and Financial Institutions," *New York State*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-signs-legislation-honor-and-support-holocaust-survivors-educational-cultural>

## Background

On August 10, 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law Chapter 490 of the Laws of 2022 requiring a survey regarding instruction about the Holocaust within New York State public school districts. Through the survey, superintendents are required to attest that the district is teaching about the Holocaust appropriately as part of classroom instruction aligned with the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards and §801 of Education Law.

§801 of NYS Education Law that requires school districts teach about the Holocaust. It states that:

In order to promote a spirit of patriotic and civic service and obligation and to foster in the children of the state moral and intellectual qualities which are essential in preparing to meet the obligations of citizenship ..., the regents of The University of the State of New York shall prescribe courses of instruction in patriotism, citizenship, and human rights issues, with particular attention to the study of the inhumanity of genocide, slavery (including the freedom trail and underground railroad), the Holocaust, and the mass starvation in Ireland from 1845 to 1850, to be maintained and followed in all the schools of the state. The boards of education and trustees of the several cities and school districts of the state shall require instruction to be given in such courses, by the teachers employed in the schools therein. All pupils attending such schools, over the age of eight years, shall attend upon such instruction.

School district superintendents were made aware that if they did not attest affirmatively that such instruction is provided, or if they did not respond to the survey, they would be required to prepare and implement a corrective action plan to comply with the law. This plan would be submitted to the Commissioner of Education with a certain timeframe for approval, form and format that is acceptable to the Commissioner.

## **Educational Context**

*Learning Standards*, adopted by the Board of Regents, are defined as the knowledge, skills, and understandings that individuals habitually demonstrate over time because of instruction and experience. These standards are the same for all students in the state and help guide curriculum that individual districts choose to incorporate into classrooms.

*Curriculum* is the sequence of instruction and learning experiences in a course or grade level that provides students the opportunity to achieve the applicable learning standards. Curriculum is often divided into units and lessons, and includes an outline of the content, concepts, and skills that will be taught, and in what sequence they will be taught. Curriculum must be aligned to the applicable NYS Learning Standards; when it is, it is referred to as “standards-based curriculum.” Curriculum in New York State is always locally determined. The New York State Education Department does not create, mandate, provide, advise on, or vet curriculum.

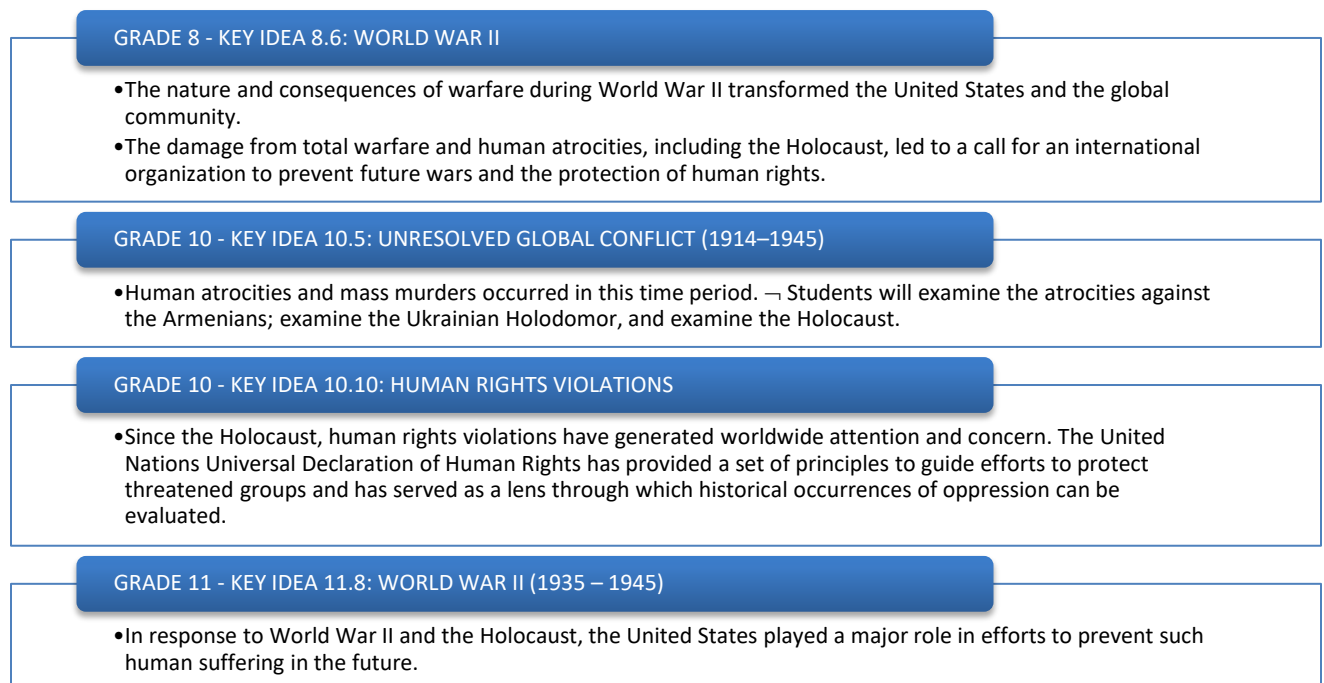
The New York State Social Studies Learning Standards feature five specific content area standards for social studies, which are indicators of what students should learn and be able to do upon completion of the K-12 Social Studies program:

**Figure 1 - New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies**



The *K-12 Social Studies Framework* guides local curriculum development in social studies. It fuses the New York State Learning Standards with social studies practices, key ideas, conceptual understandings, and content specifications. Teachers use the K-12 Social Studies Framework to incorporate content into their lesson plans to ensure students meet the standards. It helps teachers across the state identify the course content for each grade level and make connections to the broader standards. The content in the K-12 Social Studies Framework is also the basis for two social studies Regents examinations typically administered at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. All students in New York State are expected to study the Holocaust at multiple points in social studies. The Holocaust is explicitly referenced in the K-12 Social Studies Framework for courses in 8th, 10th, and 11th grades (see Figure 2 below).

**Figure 1: Explicit references to the Holocaust in the K-12 Social Studies Framework**





In addition to the historical analysis integral to social studies education, the Holocaust is a topic that is often found in curricula across subject areas. Due to the timeless literature and rich historical texts that arose from the Holocaust, it is a topic often at the center of English Language Art (ELA) lessons. The Holocaust is not explicitly referenced in the ELA learning standards because those standards are grounded in the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening instead of content. The texts districts use in order to fulfill ELA standards are aspects of their curriculum and, therefore, locally determined.

NYSED promotes Holocaust education in ways beyond issuing the learning standards. Each year, NYSED issues the Yavner Award to two recipients. These awards provide recognition of a teacher and a citizen who have made outstanding contributions to education about the Holocaust and other violations of human rights in New York State. NYSED also works to support schools with incorporating Holocaust education within their instructional programs. The Office of Standards and Instruction developed a Holocaust Education resources page that includes examples of New York State, national, and international resources that could be used in the classroom. Holocaust Education resources can be found on the [NYSED Social Studies webpage](#).

## Survey

The Holocaust Instructional Education survey was developed by NYSED to identify which school districts are complying with Section 801 of Education Law. The survey included six questions about Holocaust instruction in districts and can be found in Appendix A.

NYSED sent a memo to BOCES District Superintendents, the BIG 5 public school districts, and school district superintendents in early October 2022 informing them of the survey requirement. A list of questions and instructions on how to complete the survey in NYSED's secure online portal were also sent at that time. Districts were given a deadline of November 10, 2022 to submit answers to all six questions. They were also informed that any district that did not respond to the survey or did not affirmatively attest that Holocaust instruction was being provided to students in middle and high schools would be placed on a corrective action plan to comply with the instruction required by Article 17, Section 801 of Education Law.

The survey was sent to all 687 public school districts. It is important to note that the New York City Department of Education is considered one school district, and is counted once in this survey. In addition, 39 districts that received the survey only serve elementary students.

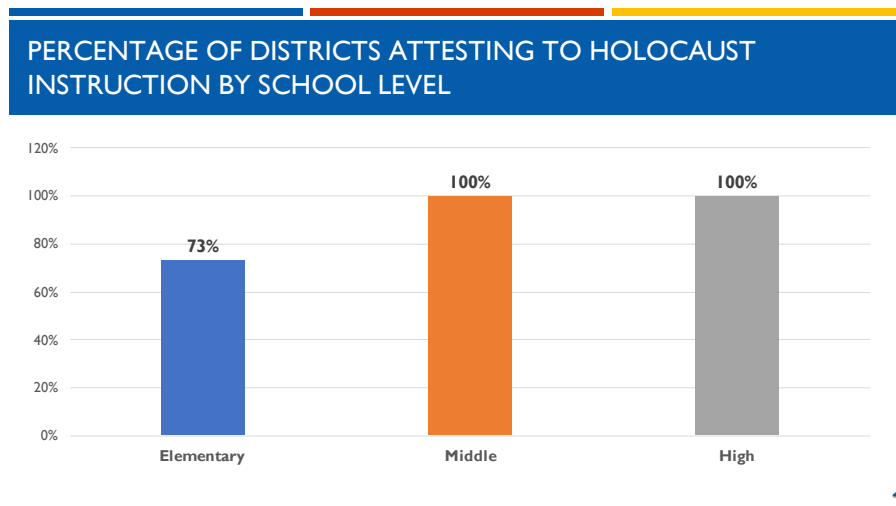
## Results

All districts submitted a survey response to NYSED. Therefore, no districts will be automatically placed on a corrective action plan due to a lack of submission.

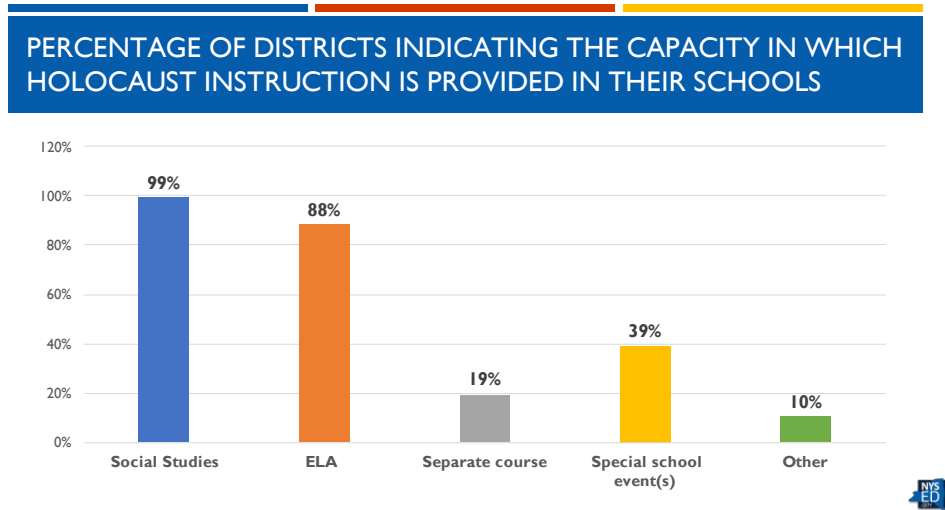
99.9% of school districts attest to teaching about the Holocaust. Only one district attested that the Holocaust is not part of their curriculum. Because the NYS Learning Standards do not require Holocaust instruction until Grade 8, the district that only provides instruction in grades K-6 is in compliance with state regulations and will not be placed on a corrective action plan.

100% of districts with secondary level instruction report the Holocaust is taught at the middle and high school levels (Table 1). All students in New York public districts will receive Holocaust instruction at multiple points in their education, most in more than one subject area. Also, 73% of districts include the Holocaust as part of their elementary-level instruction, even though it is not required by the NYS Learning Standards.

**Table 1: Survey Question 1: I attest that, in compliance with Education Law §801, my school district provides instruction related to the Holocaust to students at the following levels: (select all that apply)**



**Table 2 - Question 5: In what capacity does your school provide instruction related to the Holocaust? Select all that apply.**



*99% of districts with secondary schools indicate they teach the Holocaust as “embedded in their social studies curriculum” and 88.5% indicate they teach the Holocaust as “embedded in their ELA curriculum” even though it is not required by the standards (Table 2).* Many districts also place special emphasis on the Holocaust by developing specialized courses, hosting special events, and in other ways. Four districts claim to not embed the Holocaust into their social studies curriculum. Three are elementary-only districts and are not required to teach about the Holocaust. The fourth is a district that utilizes special events to address the Holocaust and appropriate standards.

Schools were also asked to respond in narratives to four prompts in the survey. The first three narrative prompts asked districts to describe how they “provide instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards” at each school level. Figures 3, 4, and 5 feature verbatim responses from districts on how they are providing Holocaust instruction

**Figure 2 - Survey Question 2: Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

Embedded within the  
Social Studies  
Curriculum

**SOUTH ORANGETOWN CSD**

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- In the spring of 2021, Social Studies teachers and school leaders (K-12) visited the Holocaust Museum & Center for Tolerance and Education at Rockland Community College. Formerly located in Spring Valley, the museum was relocated to RCC and took five years to create. Our District team spent the morning touring and learning about the museum, discussing curriculum connections and planning for the museum's staff to visit with our elementary students and for our middle and high school students to take field trips to the museum.

Embedded within the  
English Language Arts  
Curriculum

**GENESSEE VALLEY CSD**

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- 6th Grade ELA Holocaust Study: In 6th grade, we complete a book study of the nonfiction novel *Four Perfect Pebbles: A True Story of the Holocaust* by Lila Perl and Marion Blumenthal Lazan. In this unit, students have their own copy of the book and we cover several skills as they independently read the novel. We conduct mini lessons as a whole group, meet with smaller groups, and work individually with students as needed. Students will read and write in response to texts.

Through special school  
event(s)

**SOUTHERN CAYUGA CSD**

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- One of 11 sites nationwide to receive an Anne Frank Tree sapling from the Anne Frank Center USA, the Southern Cayuga Anne Frank Tree Project sponsors a birthday party each June for elementary students commemorating Anne Frank's birthday of 6/12/29. The celebration includes guests readers or teachers reading from grade level appropriate books about Anne Frank so students understand the significance of Anne as a victim and diarist of the Holocaust.

Other (please specify)

**MILLBROOK CSD**

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- The music department chooses pieces from different cultures and explore the music and the culture and region from which the music came.

**Figure 3 - Survey Question 3: Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL**

Embedded within the  
Social Studies  
Curriculum

**TOWN OF WEBB UFSD**

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- We use a similar approach as we do with Middle School, mixing in with these two methods lengthy class discussions on the nature and impact of the Holocaust. We provide instruction through the use of PowerPoint notes as well as videos that included interviews with survivors and their experiences. We also take a virtual tour through many of the prisons as well as the extermination camps. Students use some of the sources to construct a Critical Issues essay on human rights violations throughout history. Some reading excerpts that are included are from the Diary of Ann Frank. In years past, we have shown clips from Schindler's list. Students are graded and assessed using regents-level questions, document-based questions and well as in essay writing. We go into the details on the perpetrators, the target groups associated with it, and the horrific outcome. Then from there, we usually go into the creation of Israel post-WWII by the UN and the lasting results of this dark period.

Embedded within the  
English Language Arts  
Curriculum

**GREENWICH CSD**

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- Instruction about the Holocaust is taught in English 8 through the use of the play Diary of Anne Frank, which is based on the novel Diary of a Young Girl based on the diary entries of Anne Frank. The United States Holocaust Museum is used in conjunction during this time to build background knowledge about the timeline and about student selected topics of interest. The unit culminates with a WWII historical fiction book club in which students will choose a historical fiction novel to analyze with their book club members and create a newspaper that contains headlines and articles about significant events from the novel.

Through special school  
event(s)

**ATTICA CSD**

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- 8th grade students take a trip to Washington DC that includes time at the US National Holocaust Memorial Museum; 6th grade students complete an inter-disciplinary project that culminate in a wax museum display. Multiple individuals that the students research are associated with WW II and the holocaust including Anne Frank, FDR, Eisenhower, and other world leaders of the era.

Other (please specify)

**GREENBURGH CSD**

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- Woodlands Middle and High School students participate in the Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center's White Rose Student Research Contest annually and Woodlands students have placed first in middle and high school categories Students Advocating for Equity (SAFE) Club was created last school year to raise awareness about human rights/social justice issues

**Figure 4 - Survey Question 4: Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL.**

Embedded within the Social Studies Curriculum

**SALAMANCA CITY SD**

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- 9th and 10th grade participate in an Atrocity Museum- Human Rights Atrocities throughout time into modern genocides highlights Holocaust within those atrocities

Embedded within the English Language Arts Curriculum

**SCIO CSD**

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- In 10th grade English class students read Weisel's memoir Night in addition to multiple supplemental texts to enhance and expand their understanding of Weisel's experiences. Students read stories, poems, nonfiction pieces, and excerpts from first person accounts of the Holocaust and the events that led up to it. The materials I use in teaching the memoir Night were developed in part by Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach and Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff. Kassenoff is the founding director of the University of Miami Holocaust Teacher Institute, Education Chairperson at the Holocaust Memorial in Miami Beach, Florida, and the Education Specialist for Holocaust Studies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

As a Separate Course

**COLTON-PIERREPONT CSD**

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- Students who take the Holocaust Elective course (semester) travel to Washington, D.C. to tour the Permanent Exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Through special school event(s)

**BUFFALO CITY SCHOOLS**

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- Buffalo State College Anne Frank Project (various schools) - Holocaust Survivors share stories at select schools.

Other (please specify)

**FAYETTEVILLE-MANLIUS CSD**

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- Embedded within the World Languages curriculum.

The final survey question asked districts to report how their teachers have been trained for teaching about the Holocaust. Responses were variable but included some commonalities. Many districts referenced specific professional development for teachers provided by sources outside their districts (consultants, museums, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), etc.), while others simply mentioned their teachers receive such training. Many other districts referenced teacher certification and the necessary coursework teachers need prior to becoming certified. Fewer districts note that they have a robust general professional development program in place, while others indicate that no specific training opportunities have been given to teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The Holocaust Instruction Survey was issued to New York school districts to fulfill statutory requirements set forth by the NYS Legislature and signed by Governor Hochul. Results show that all districts that must instruct students about the Holocaust are doing so. In fact, a large majority of schools go beyond the New York State Learning Standards to create instructional programming about the Holocaust in courses and grade levels where it is not required content.



## Appendix A – Holocaust Survey

**District Superintendent Attestation** - I attest that instruction related to the Holocaust is provided at all appropriate grade levels in compliance with section eight hundred one of the education law.

### Holocaust Instruction Survey Questions

**Question 1:** I attest that, in compliance with Education Law §801, my school district provides instruction related to the Holocaust to students at the following levels: (select all that apply)

- Elementary
- Middle
- High School
- None

**Question 2:** Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the Elementary School level.

**Question 3:** Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the Middle School level.

**Question 4:** Please describe how your district provides instruction about the Holocaust through a curriculum aligned to the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards at the High School level.

**Question 5:** In what capacity does your school provide instruction related to the Holocaust? Select all that apply.

- Embedded within the Social Studies Curriculum
- Embedded within the English Language Arts Curriculum
- As a separate course
- Through special school event(s)
- Other (please specify)

**Question 6:** What type of training have the educators had to prepare them for teaching about the Holocaust?