



CAIR



CAIR
NEW JERSEY

CAIR'S

2025-26

BACK TO

SCHOOL

RESOURCE

GUIDE

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations (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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Introduction

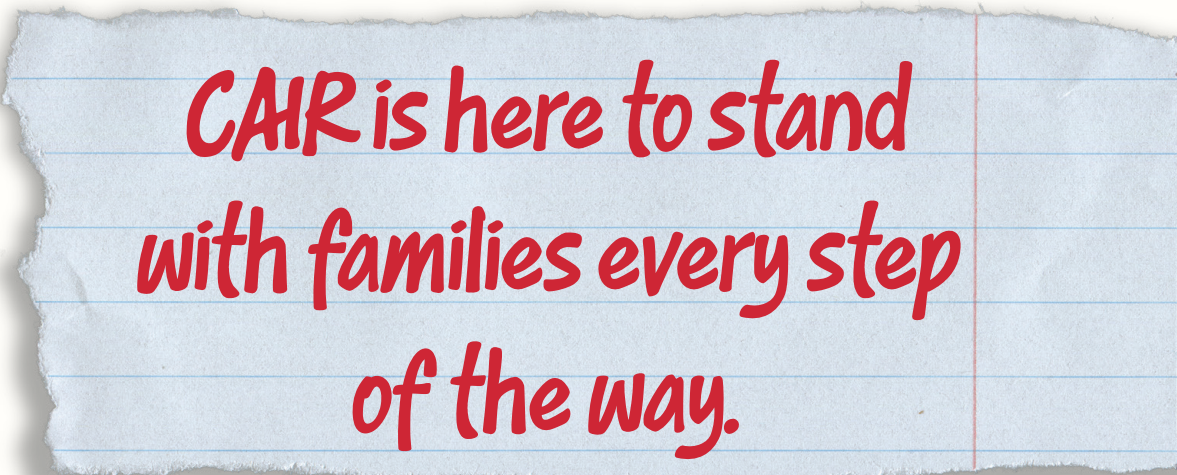
The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, is proud to present this resource guide to empower students and parents as they begin a new academic year. For decades, CAIR has worked to defend the rights of Muslim students, protect religious freedom, and ensure that schools are welcoming and inclusive spaces for all children. In 2024, CAIR launched its Unhostile Campus Campaign aimed at fostering college and university 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



*CAIR is here to stand
with families every step
of the way.*

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.



Remember:
Your rights.
Your voice.
Your faith.



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.

CAIR's Ramadan 2025/1446 Toolkit

CAIR's Ramadan Toolkit helps Muslim students, employees, and families navigate public schools and workplaces during Ramadan. It includes ready-to-use templates to request accommodations, raise awareness, and promote inclusive policies. Includes: • Ramadan start date guidance • Accommodation letters

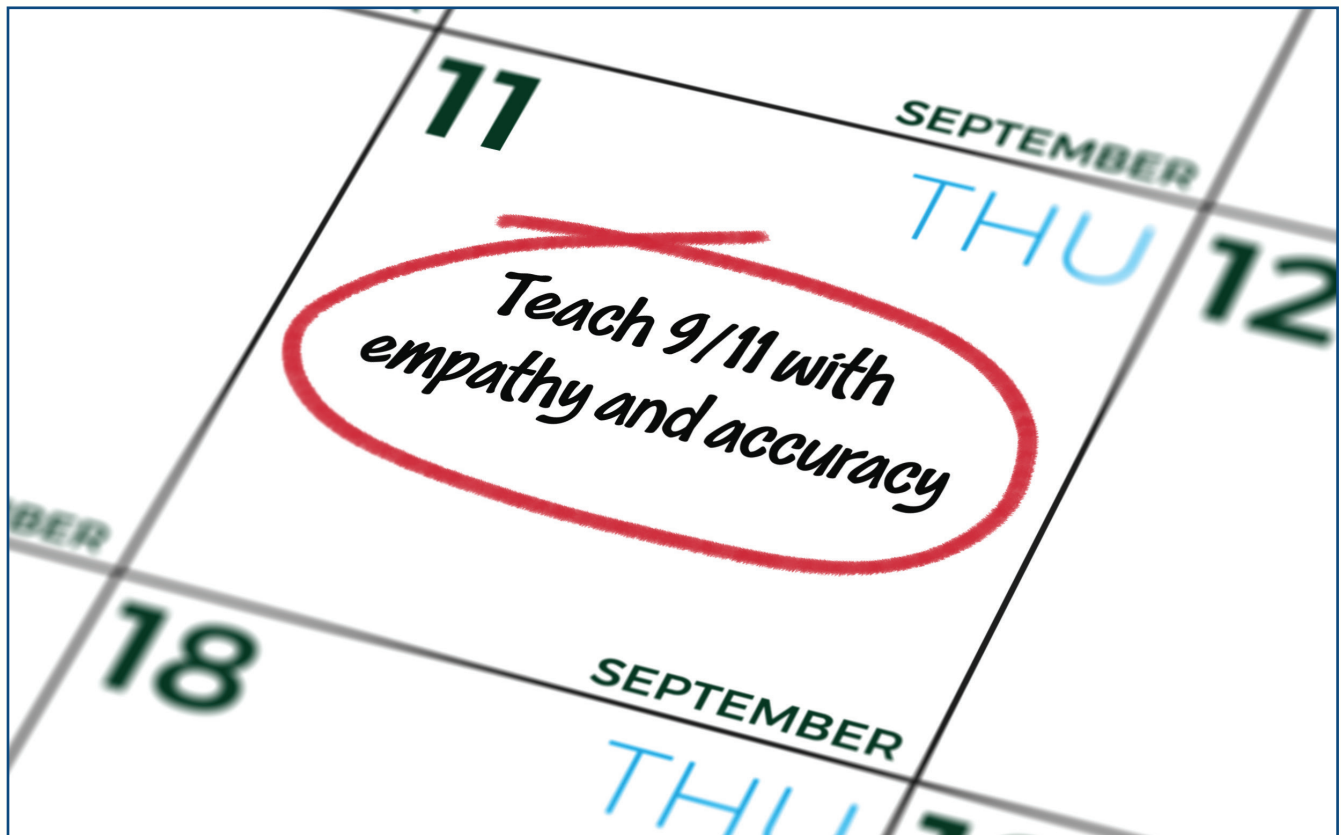
for students and employees • Sample Ramadan & Eid resolutions for officials
This toolkit protects religious rights, promotes inclusion, and makes it easier to communicate needs respectfully and effectively. Download the full toolkit:

<https://cairflorida.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/RamadanToolkit2025.pdf>

Guidance on Challenging Topics

Tools for the 9/11 Unit

The catastrophic events of 9/11 catapulted the Global War on Terror, marking an aggressive shift in U.S. domestic and foreign policy and an erosion of civil liberties through the Patriot Act, which practically targeted Muslims. The 9/11 attacks also marked a renewed and egregious “othering” of Muslims and those who may appear to be Muslim, which has been evident in mainstream media, on campaign trails, in literature and advertising, and even in the classroom. To help teachers adopt a more nuanced approach to 9/11 in their classrooms, CAIR-NJ and Teaching While Muslim (TWM) developed a curriculum with pertinent tools to guide classroom discussions. The curriculum, which is tailored to elementary, middle, and high school levels, includes suggested texts, videos, novels, and discussion questions. Understanding the context of 9/11 and teaching about it in a way that does not target or marginalize any religious group is critical to creating a welcoming classroom environment. To access the curriculum, visit cair-nj.org/911curriculum. Share this resource with the teachers you know and your local school board.





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 Muslims, Arabs, Jews, Palestinians, and others, particularly since October 2023, has ignited worldwide discussions, including within educational settings.

Talking to Young Children About Gaza

Children hear about Gaza, and they deserve safe, honest, and age-appropriate conversations. CAIR encourages families and educators to provide compassionate guidance rooted in dignity and justice.

Tips for Parents & Educators:

- ▶ **Listen first:** Let children share what they've heard or felt.
- ▶ **Affirm emotions:** Validate sadness, fear, or confusion.
- ▶ **Speak clearly:** Use simple, age-appropriate language to explain injustice and human rights.
- ▶ **Promote values:** Emphasize fairness, nonviolence, and equality for all.
- ▶ **Offer action:** Encourage small, meaningful responses—such as prayer, kindness, or community support—that give children a sense of agency.

By centering compassion and truth, families can help children process difficult realities while building resilience, empathy, and pride in their identity.¹

Why talk about foreign issues in school?

Avoiding 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 the Gaza genocide, including the violence and the imbalance of power.
- ▶ **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 affirm that advocacy for Palestinian liberation is not equivalent to supporting terrorism or antisemitism.
- ▶ **Promote understanding:** Encourage students to explore key terms such as apartheid and terrorism through the lens of international law and human rights frameworks.
- ▶ **Center universal values:** Highlight principles of non-violence, equality, and 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 an 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

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 an 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

Excuse from music/art/sex education classes

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: 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 an 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

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