

D.C. third-graders were made to reenact episodes from the Holocaust

By [Nicole Asbury](#)

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A Watkins Elementary School staff member told third-graders in library class to reenact scenes from the Holocaust, directing them to dig their classmates' mass graves and simulate shooting the victims, according to an email from the school's principal. The instructor was placed on leave Friday.

She allegedly assigned specific roles to students. She cast one student as Adolf Hitler, according to an email from Watkins Elementary School Principal MScott Berkowitz to the third-graders' parents. He did not name the staff member. That student is Jewish, according to the parent of a student who was asked to participate. At the end of the exercise, the child was told to pretend to die by suicide, as Hitler did.

Originally, the students were in library class on Friday for a self-directed project they would present to their classmates before winter break. But the instructor had students participate in the reenactment during their allotted research time, Berkowitz wrote to parents.

"I want to acknowledge the gravity of this poor instructional decision, as students should never be asked to act out or portray any atrocity, especially genocide, war, or murder," Berkowitz said in the email.

A different parent of a student who was a part of the reenactment said her son had to pretend to be on a train to a concentration camp, then act as if he were dying in a gas chamber. He also had to act as if he were shooting his peers, the parent said. The parent spoke on the condition of anonymity and declined to name the child.

The instructor allegedly made antisemitic comments during the reenactment. The parent said that

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The incident was reported to D.C. Public Schools' Comprehensive Alternative Resolution and Equity Team. The staff member is now on leave, pending a school investigation.

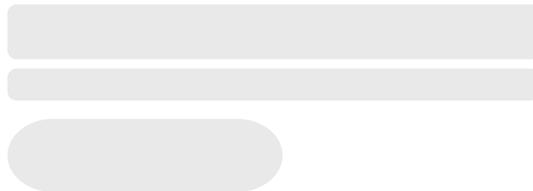
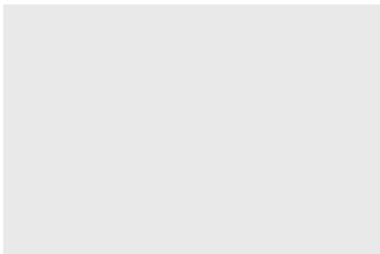
“This was not an approved lesson plan, and we sincerely apologize to our students and families who were subjected to this incident,” a spokesperson for DCPS said.

The entire class met with the school's mental health response team after the Friday incident, according to Berkowitz's email.

Other local schools have reported incidents of bigotry in recent months. At Woodrow Wilson High School in Northwest Washington, several swastikas, the n-word and the phrase “white power” were scrawled on the wall of a men's bathroom early this month, according to [reporting by student journalists at the Beacon](#), the school's independent newspaper.

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