

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 172

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JANUARY 19, 2023

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

Assemblywoman SADAF F. JAFFER

District 16 (Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex and Somerset)

Assemblyman RAJ MUKHERJI

District 33 (Hudson)

Co-Sponsored by:

**Assemblywomen Lampitt, Quijano, Assemblymen DeAngelo, Stanley,
Conaway, Giblin, Assemblywoman Haider and Assemblyman Greenwald**

SYNOPSIS

Urges incorporation of Sikhism instruction into social studies curriculum.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/13/2023)

1 **AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** urging the State Board of Education to
2 require school districts to incorporate Sikhism instruction into
3 the social studies curriculum and development of certain course
4 materials.
5
6 **WHEREAS**, The cultural and intellectual diversity of the State of New
7 Jersey is a source of strength and inspiration for its citizens; and
8 **WHEREAS**, The Sikh community continues to play an integral, though
9 often overlooked, role in strengthening the religious, social, and
10 political fabric of this State; and
11 **WHEREAS**, Founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of India
12 during the 15th century, the Sikh community began immigrating to
13 the United States in the late 1800s and has played an important role
14 in developing this country and the State of New Jersey and
15 enriching American culture, history, economy, and diversity; and
16 **WHEREAS**, The Sikh monotheistic tradition teaches its adherents to
17 practice the universal principles of truthful living, service to
18 humanity, devotion to God, and the belief that every person,
19 regardless of race, gender, sex, or creed, is equal before God; and
20 **WHEREAS**, Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion with nearly 30
21 million adherents, roughly 1,000,000 of whom call the United
22 States home; and
23 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey is home to one of the largest populations of
24 Sikh Americans in the United States, with about 100,000 Sikh
25 Americans living in the State; and
26 **WHEREAS**, Some of the most notable Sikh Americans live in, and
27 contribute to, the State, including former Attorney General Gurbir
28 Grewal and City of Hoboken Mayor Ravinder Bhalla, and the Sikh
29 community has made positive social, cultural, economic, and
30 political contributions to New Jersey; and
31 **WHEREAS**, Despite their contributions to society, Sikhs continue to
32 experience discrimination and hate, often by individuals who are
33 unaware of the beliefs and practices of the faith; and
34 **WHEREAS**, Sikhism is a distinct religion, different from Hinduism and
35 Islam, with a unique set of beliefs and practices whereby only
36 followers of this religion wear a turban as a symbol of the faith and
37 commitment to equality and justice; and
38 **WHEREAS**, Cultural and religious illiteracy, coupled with a distinct
39 visible identity in the form of a turban, has led to xenophobic
40 violence against Sikhs since their arrival in this country more than a
41 century ago; and
42 **WHEREAS**, Sikh Americans have been particularly vulnerable to anti-
43 Muslim sentiment and xenophobic violence after the terrorist
44 attacks of September 11, 2001 because of their appearance; and
45 **WHEREAS**, During the COVID-19 pandemic, racist and discriminatory
46 attacks have risen against Asian communities, including Sikhs, a
47 majority of which are attributed to lack of knowledge; and

1 **WHEREAS**, The lack of culture and history curriculum on Sikhism in
2 mainstream courses at public schools has perpetuated violence,
3 intolerance, and bullying against children who practice the religion;
4 and

5 **WHEREAS**, Sikh children disproportionately experience school
6 bullying, with estimates indicating that over 50 percent of all Sikh
7 children, and roughly 67 percent of turbaned-Sikhs, endure physical
8 or verbal abuse while at school; and

9 **WHEREAS**, It is important for New Jersey to ensure that our younger
10 generations are taught to be more empathetic and inclusive towards
11 other religions and cultures; and

12 **WHEREAS**, On January 18, 2022, Governor Murphy signed P.L.2021,
13 c.416 (C.18A:35-4.44), requiring school districts to incorporate
14 instruction on the history and contributions of Asian Americans and
15 Pacific Islanders, many of whom include Sikhs, within the
16 curriculum for grades kindergarten through 12 as part of a school
17 district's implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning
18 Standards in Social Studies; and

19 **WHEREAS**, On the same day, Governor Murphy also signed P.L.2021,
20 c.410 (C.18A:4-51 et seq.), establishing the Commission on Asian
21 American Heritage within the Department of Education, which is
22 tasked with developing curriculum guidelines for the inclusion of
23 Asian and Asian American history, culture, and heritage, into the
24 social studies curriculum; and

25 **WHEREAS**, The Commission on Asian American Heritage is
26 legislatively required to meet with county and local school officials
27 to assist in the planning, coordination, and modification of courses
28 relating to the culture, history, and heritage of people of Asian or
29 Asian American descent; and

30 **WHEREAS**, The State has imposed many requirements concerning the
31 school district curriculum, which burden the schools and increase
32 the workload on students. Building on prior legislation, explicitly
33 incorporating Sikhism instruction into the social studies curriculum
34 will decrease this burden while ensuring that students receive
35 critical instruction and gain understanding of the world's fifth
36 largest religion; now, therefore,

37

38 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the General Assembly of the State of New
39 Jersey:

40

41 1. The General Assembly of the State of New Jersey urges the
42 State Board of Education to require school districts to incorporate
43 Sikhism instruction in the existing social studies curriculum for
44 elementary and secondary public school students.

45

46 2. This House further urges the Commission on Asian
47 American Heritage to coordinate with county and local school
48 officials to develop course material, of at least one chapter, on Sikh

1 history and culture to be incorporated within each school district's
2 social studies curriculum.

3

4 3. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
5 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the
6 Sikh Youth Alliance Inc., each member of the New Jersey State
7 Board of Education, each member of the Commission on Asian
8 American Heritage, the President of the New Jersey Conference of
9 Mayors, and the Executive Director of the New Jersey School
10 Boards Association.

11

12

13

STATEMENT

14

15 This Assembly resolution urges the State Board of Education to
16 require school districts to incorporate Sikhism instruction into the
17 existing social studies curriculum and the Commission on Asian
18 American Heritage to coordinate with local school officials to
19 develop relevant course material.

20 Sikhism is currently the world's fifth largest religion with
21 roughly 30 million adherents worldwide, including approximately
22 1,000,000 Sikhs in the United States and 100,000 living in the
23 State. Founded in the 15th century in the Punjab region of India,
24 Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that teaches the fundamental
25 principles of truthful living, service to humanity, and devotion to
26 God. Sikhs believe that every person, regardless of race, gender, or
27 sex is equal before God.

28 Acting on these basic principles, Sikhs are known to make
29 lasting and meaningful social contributions wherever they reside,
30 including within the State of New Jersey. Notable Sikhs
31 contributing to the State include former Attorney General Gurbir
32 Grewal and City of Hoboken Mayor Ravinder Bhalla.

33 Although Sikhs have made immense contributions throughout
34 history and within the State, they have long faced oppression and
35 discrimination throughout India and the rest of the world.
36 Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, anti-Sikh bigotry
37 increased dramatically through the United States, as many people
38 erroneously associated the Sikh's uncut beards and traditional
39 turbans with religious Islamic radicals. During the COVID-19
40 pandemic, Sikhs have experienced violence as part of the rising
41 attacks against Asian communities. Sikh students endure school
42 bullying and hate crime assaults at a higher rate than many of their
43 classmates. However, by refusing to respond with hate or violence,
44 the Sikh community continues to promote love and peace in the
45 face of discrimination.

46 The General Assembly recognizes the importance of educating
47 its diverse residents and students to prevent violence, intolerance,
48 and bullying. Building on recent legislative enactments, this

AR172 MURPHY, JAFFER

5

1 resolution aims to combat a misunderstanding of Sikhism by urging
2 the State Board of Education to include the religion within the
3 curriculum for all students in elementary and secondary public
4 schools and requiring the Commission on Asian American Heritage
5 to work with local school officials in the creation of Sikhism
6 instruction materials.