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OPINION // YOUR VOICE

Texas requires Holocaust education. Too many schools don't know it.

Small and rural Texas districts need access, clarity and partners so required moral education reaches every classroom.

By **Randy Willis and Kenneth E. Goldberg**, *Guest columnists*

Jan 26, 2026

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A visitor watches a video of Holocaust survivors sharing personal stories during a 2024 visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio. Many rural schools are hours away from such museums, adding to the need for other resources to help them teach students about the Holocaust, Randy Willis and Kenneth E. Goldberg write.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News



Listen Now: Texas requires Holocaust education. Too many schools are failing to teach it.

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A group of dedicated superintendents from schools across the state were recently asked a straightforward question: Do they meet Texas' requirements to teach about the

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Not a single hand went up in the room. That silence was not defiance. It was exposure. And it reflected the results of a 2024 statewide survey, which found that most rural respondents were either unaware or only slightly aware of Holocaust Remembrance Week, established by the Legislature in 2019, and which this year runs from Jan. 26-30.

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That recognition laid the groundwork for our organizations to come together and develop an unexpected partnership to make sure the very schools responsible for teaching about the Holocaust have the understanding, knowledge and tools to do so.

One of us is the executive director of the Texas Association of Rural Schools, and a former teacher, coach, principal and superintendent in Williamson County; his wife is a second-generation descendant of Holocaust survivors who speaks in schools about her family's experience.

The other is chair of the Texas Holocaust, Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission, which is an arm of the state government, and a longtime leader in the Dallas Jewish community whose mother- and father-in-law were Holocaust survivors.

We know how policy looks on paper, and we know how schools function in practice. In rural Texas, school leaders wear a lot of hats. They might cut the grass one day and drive the bus the next. Yet, they are still expected to comply with the same vast education code as the largest districts in the state.

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When something is missed in a small district, it is rarely because educators don't care. It is because they are stretched thin keeping schools running.

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That reality matters deeply when it comes to Holocaust education, which is moral education. It teaches how intolerance harder ordinary societies can descend into extraord

And it is more critical than ever now, given th which recently included a synagogue arson i

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When students hear first-hand accounts of the tragedy and trauma of the Holocaust, it stops being abstract. It is no longer dates and statistics in a textbook, but families,

grandparents, and names. Students listen differently when they realize this history X
did not happen to strangers in a distant past
the present.

For younger K-5 students, this includes understanding
bullying and learning about the Jewish people
Holocaust itself as they get older.

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These lessons go to the heart of why we teach. Math and science teach skills. This teaches values. It helps students understand how misinformation spreads, how ordinary people can be pulled into extraordinary harm, and how other ordinary people can choose to stand up for others.

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But belief alone is not enough. Educators need access, clarity and support.

Nearly two-thirds of Texas school districts serve fewer than 1,600 students. Many are hours away from major metropolitan areas, museums or Holocaust education centers. They do not have curriculum departments or instructional coaches and rely on state agencies, regional educational service centers, and associations for professional development and guidance.

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That gap is exactly why we began our collaborative work with the Texas Commission on Holocaust and Religious Intolerance, the Texas Commission on African American History, and the Texas Commission on the History of the American Indian. The Texas Education Agency's new Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Committee will help districts develop resources and statewide guidance. The Texas Education Agency will also recognize the needs and challenges that schools face in making sure that these resources actually reach classrooms.

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For rural districts, the question is not whether this history and the current scourge of antisemitism matter. They know it does. The question is whether they know where to turn for support. Our partnership ensures that geography does not determine whether students receive this vital and required education.

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Lessons about the Holocaust are not limited to large cities or well-resourced districts. They belong in every Texas classroom. Ensuring that happens is both a moral responsibility and a shared one, so that the next time superintendents are asked about it, every single hand goes up.

Randy Willis is executive director of the Texas Association of Rural Schools and a longtime Texas public education leader. Kenneth E. Goldberg is chair of the Texas Holocaust, Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission.

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Jan 26, 2026

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Randy Willis and Kenneth E. Goldberg

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