

# SENATE RESOLUTION No. 108

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY

### 220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JANUARY 26, 2023

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator LINDA R. GREENSTEIN**

**District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)**

**Senator M. TERESA RUIZ**

**District 29 (Essex)**

**Co-Sponsored by:**

**Senators Diegnan, Singleton, Thompson, Burgess, Lagana and Gopal**

**SYNOPSIS**

Urges incorporation of Sikhism instruction into social studies curriculum.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



**(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 11/27/2023)**

1   **A SENATE 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.  
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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

SR108 GREENSTEIN, RUIZ

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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,

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38 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:*

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

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

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

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

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### STATEMENT

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15 This Senate 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 Senate recognizes the importance of educating its diverse  
47 residents and students to prevent violence, intolerance, and  
48 bullying. Building on recent legislative enactments, this resolution

**SR108 GREENSTEIN, RUIZ**

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