



## FACT SHEET:

# Protecting Students from Discrimination Based on Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects all students from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department. This fact sheet describes ways this protection covers students who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group.

### Title VI's protection from discrimination:

**1** Title VI's protection from race, color, or national origin discrimination extends to students who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived: (i) shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or (ii) citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity. For more information, please see OCR's 2017 [Know Your Rights: Title VI and Religion fact sheet](#).

**2** Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin against students of any religion, such as students who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist, when the discrimination, for example, involves:

- racial, ethnic, or ancestral slurs or stereotypes;
- how a student looks, including skin color, physical features, or style of dress that reflects both ethnic and religious traditions; and
- a foreign accent; a foreign name, including names commonly associated with particular shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or speaking a foreign language.

**3** Because Title VI does not protect students from discrimination based only on religion, such as a school's denial of a student's request to miss class for a religious holiday, OCR refers complaints of discrimination based exclusively on religion to the [U.S. Department of Justice \(DOJ\)](#), which has jurisdiction on this issue.