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Californians for Justice (CFJ) is using taxpayer money to reward high schoolers in Long Beach for learning “restorative justice practices.” (Photo illustration by The Free Press)

EXCLUSIVE: Public Schoolers Are Paid \$1,400 a Pop to Become Social Justice Warriors

A California activist group is using taxpayer money to reward teens for learning how to fight for ‘racial justice.’



By Francesca Block
March 7, 2024



An activist group in California has paid nearly 100 public high schoolers \$1,400 each to learn how to fight for racial and social justice, *The Free Press* has learned.

Contracts between Long Beach Unified School District and Californians for Justice from 2019 to 2023, exclusively obtained by *The Free Press*, show the school district [used taxpayer funds](#) to [pay the group](#) nearly \$2 million to facilitate equity and leadership development training for students and teachers. In addition to the student stipends, the contracts also allocated a total of \$20,200 to 13 parents for participating in the group's programs.

Starting from December 2019 until now, the Long Beach Unified School District south of Los Angeles has paid at least 78 students a total of nearly \$100,000 for participating in a club run by the organization, also known as CFJ. The most recent [contract](#) runs until June 2024.

CFJ boasts [on its site](#) to have “trained hundreds of youth of color in Long Beach to be community leaders and organizers.” In Long Beach, the group successfully advocated for implementing “restorative justice practices” across the district's 84 schools, according to its site.

The money incentivizes students to participate in CFJ's programs—which are led by CFJ staff, not the district. In a recent [video](#) posted to the group's Instagram account, one student, who was asked “Why Should Students Join CFJ?” responded “You get paid good.” It's unclear which students are eligible for the stipends, but the organization's [website states](#) its “leadership development” programs operate “with a focus on low income youth, youth of color, LGBTQ youth, foster youth, and immigrant youth.”

A spokesperson for Long Beach Unified School District said the district refers to these stipends as “internships,” which ensure “equitable participation in CFJ programs, embracing diverse perspectives in education.”

But four teachers interviewed by *The Free Press* see the payments to students and their families as a “horrible propaganda strategy.” One told me, “I am shocked and horrified at such a fact.”

In 2021, for example, CFJ implemented three “student-led professional development” training sessions in the district's high schools—which cost the district \$25,000, according to the [contracts](#). During these trainings,

students were encouraged to school their own teachers on topics like implicit bias, “student voice,” and antiblack racism. These sessions also replaced traditional training for teachers that often focused on topics like lesson designs and professional development, teachers told me. The district signed CFJ on to host 15 of these trainings during the 2023–2024 school year, [contracts](#) showed.

A 2024 [article](#) about the group in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* argues that CFJ “has helped teachers in rewiring the way they connect with students—particularly students of color. This means, for example, breaking down old stereotypes where teachers are perceived as the ones with authority and knowledge to establishing a new viewpoint that teachers are allies and catalysts of the students’ own strengths and knowledge.”

One teacher, who asked not to be named out of fear of losing her job, told me these forums have transformed into a space for kids to simply air their grievances about school. She remembers one student saying that “they would come to class on time if we built relationships with them.”

The teacher said: “It’s helpful to hear their voice and know what they think would help them learn better, but I feel like you can do that with a focus group. Plus, they’re obviously reading scripts that have words that they don’t know how to say.

“The way that they are handing scripts to students, even the words coming out of the students’ mouths,” the teacher added, “it just feels like indoctrination and not information.”

Jay Goldfischer, a high school history teacher in the district, agrees.

“One of the reasons that they were hired is to help our students find their voice and be able to express it,” Goldfischer said. “But in reality, CFJ is not helping students find their own voices. It’s giving them a scripted voice that’s not their own.

“They’re teaching them parroting,” he added, “which is the exact opposite of how you empower children.”



In 2021, CFJ implemented three “student-led professional development” training sessions in the district’s high schools where students were encouraged to school their own teachers on topics like implicit bias, “student voice,” and antiblack racism. (Photo illustration by *The Free Press*)

Founded in 1996 in San José by two California activists, CFJ started out as a policy advocacy organization, but pivoted into working with schools in the mid-2000s. The registered nonprofit has nearly \$16 million in total assets, according to their most recent tax filing.

CFJ promotes itself as “a statewide youth-powered organization fighting for racial justice” that runs after-school programming in four of California’s largest school districts, including Fresno, Oakland, and San José in addition to Long Beach. From June 2020 to June 2023, the Fresno Unified School District paid a total of \$150,000 to CFJ for leadership programs, according to public documents requested by *The Free Press*. No financial agreements between CFJ and the Oakland and San José school districts could be found.

A CFJ spokesman told *The Free Press* in a February 14 email, “Our agenda is not hidden and is simple: we want the Long Beach Unified School District to be a place where every student is represented honestly in classrooms and curricula, and where they are safe to be in critical dialogue supportive of democratic participation across differences.” The spokesperson did not respond to our question asking how students were compensated for participating in their programs.

Goldfischer, who is Jewish, said CFJ is not an inclusive group—pointing to its response to the Hamas invasion of Israel on October 7. In an October 23 Instagram post—just two weeks after terrorists invaded Israel—CFJ

described the plight of the Palestinian people as “ethnic cleansing and apartheid orchestrated by white supremacist settler colonialism bent on the goal of wiping out the indigenous Palestinian population.”

After Goldfischer, his colleagues, and some parents complained to the school board in meetings and emails about the antisemitic messaging in CFJ’s posts, seven students and one community activist spoke out in support of the group at a December 6 school board meeting. In their defense of the group, six of the eight speakers used almost the exact same language, stating that CFJ has “been targeted by racist and xenophobic harassment for our support for Palestinian human rights.” One high school senior gave the exact same statement defending CFJ during the December 6 board meeting that the group’s spokesman gave to *The Free Press* on February 14.

A few weeks later, when one teacher in the district emailed her concerns to Diana Craighead, the president of Long Beach school board, Craighead emailed back: “I, too, am concerned with the antisemitic nature of their opinions.

“However,” Craighead continued, “I felt that the benefit of their support for our students outweighed my concerns.”

When asked for comment from *The Free Press*, Craighead responded via email, “I would like to state that I do not condone violence of any sort and that I am not antisemitic.

“The stance on Palestine was a student-led initiative and reflected the values of the organization to uplift and activate student voice,” she added. “This has proven to be a learning experience as well as a valuable lesson in diplomacy for our students.”

But to many, her statement showed how deeply CFJ—and its ideologies—are embedded in the district.

“My concern is becoming a reality already,” a Jewish high school teacher with nearly 30 years of experience told me. “This partnership is solidifying misinformation in young kids. That’s something that they’re going to hold on to forever, because they learned it at school.”



Francesca Block is an investigative journalist who has revealed multiple examples of miseducation in America's public schools for *The Free Press*. If you believe in this work, consider supporting us by becoming a paid subscriber today:

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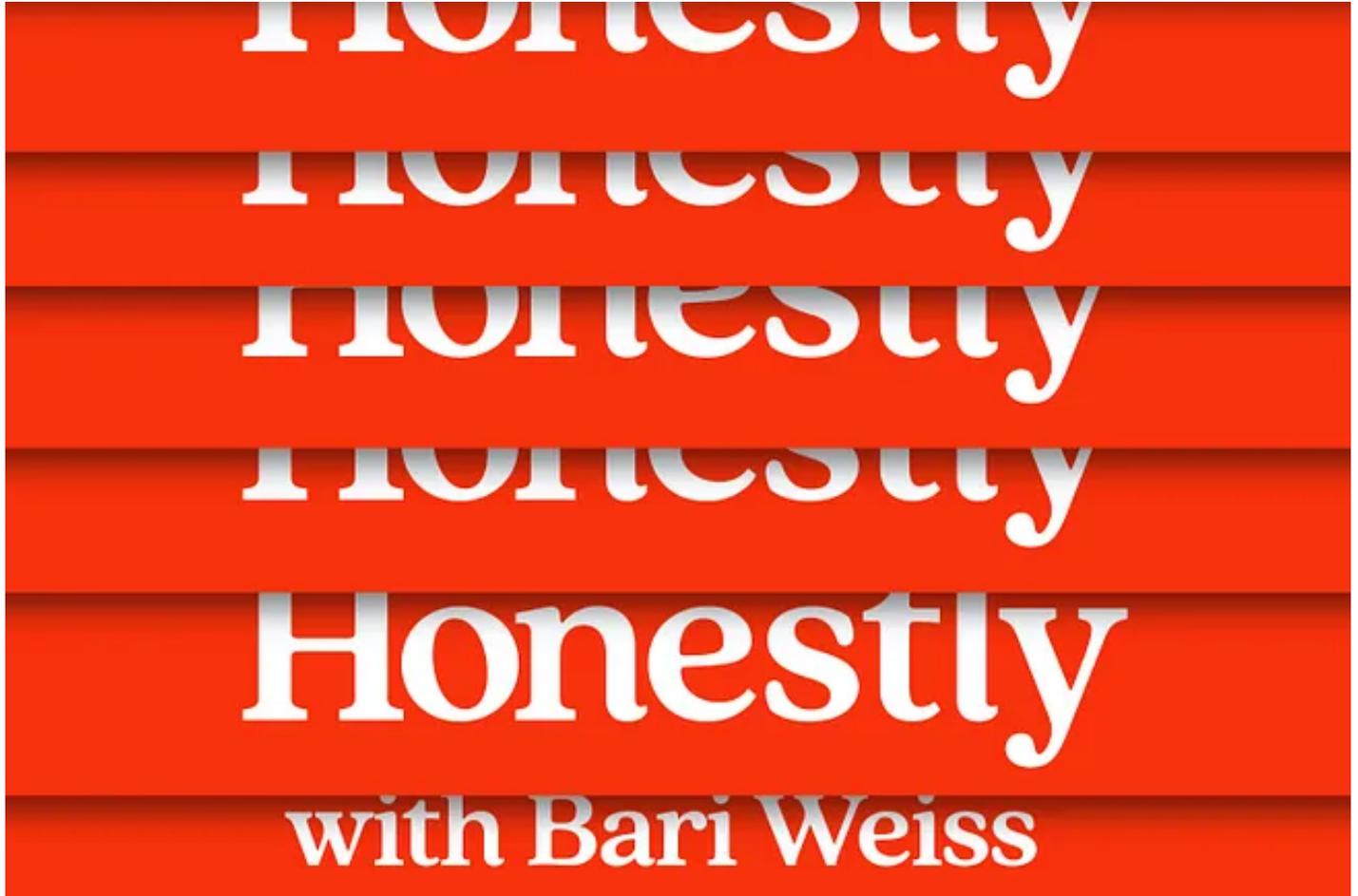
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