

July 29, 2015

**By email and mail**

Richard A. Carranza, Superintendent  
San Francisco Unified School District  
Dr. Emily Murase, President  
San Francisco Board of Education  
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San Francisco, CA 94102  
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Dear Mr. Carranza and Dr. Murase:

We write to you on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a 102-year old civil rights agency dedicated to combating anti-Semitism and all other forms of bigotry and discrimination.

We support the inclusion of the Arabic language pathways program in San Francisco's public schools. We also welcome your assurances in your July 22 community letter that the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) "does not tolerate hate speech" and that it is "not interested or willing to be embroiled in any geo-political discussions or providing for an environment where any group of people is disparaged". Nonetheless, ADL has deep and continuing concerns about the Board of Education's earlier selection of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) to conduct cultural competency trainings for SFUSD faculty and staff.

As other concerned community members have pointed out, AROC has a long history up to the present of consistently engaging in strident and extreme anti-Israel activism and thereby sowing division in the Bay Area. We do not believe that AROC could or would deliver Arab cultural competency training without inappropriately injecting its biased views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into its training. Indeed, on July 20 on KPFA's *A Rude Awakening* program<sup>1</sup>, Lara Kiswani, AROC's Executive Director, admitted as much when she said:

"It is absolutely absurd that an Arab organization in the city of San Francisco is expected to not take a position in support of Palestinian people or to not do work around the suffering of Palestinian people. To expect an Arab organization not to do so is the most ridiculous thing that we could actually ask of [sic] at this time when the whole world is speaking on behalf of Arab and Palestinian people. So for us this is part and parcel of our work and for us we know that the community stands

<sup>1</sup> <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=210628>

behind the values of human rights, the values of social justice, the values of self-determination and dignity for all people. And that's what we fight for on a daily basis and Arabic language pathways is just another example of that."

Further to our concerns about Ms. Kiswani and AROC's overall bias, she peppered her remarks throughout the program with conspiratorial and unsubstantiated accusations of the Jewish Community Relations Council wielding alleged economic dominance and outsized political influence: its "economic coercion" (said twice), "bullying tactics", "shared political interests", "shared profitable relationships", "an outside well-financed political interest group", etc. etc. Whether said wittingly or not, her misinformation evoking long-standing and hurtful anti-Jewish stereotypes of money, power, and nefarious motives is offensive.

In our diverse city, students can only benefit by exposure to the many languages and cultures represented among their peers and school faculty members, including Arabic. Based on AROC's antagonistic record, including Ms. Kiswani's recent on-air comments, its inclusion in SFUSD's programming would erode the ability of San Francisco schools to foster environments where individuals of all backgrounds are respected and welcomed. SFUSD should only partner with providers that are inclusive and will reinforce the district's goals of creating respectful schools and communities.

With appreciation for your July 22 statement, we respectfully request that you explicitly affirm AROC will not serve as a partner in SFUSD's proposed Arabic language pathways program.

Very truly yours,



Wendy Tonkin  
Regional Board Chair



Seth Brysk  
Regional Director

cc: (by email only)

Board of Education Vice-President Matt Haney  
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