

## TEACHERS 4 SOCIAL JUSTICE



Dear Superintendent and Members of the Board of Education,

We are writing this letter to address the politics introduced by the Jewish Community Resource Center (JCRC) into the policy discussion of Arabic & Vietnamese language pathways. Specifically, JCRC raised the question: Should the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) be included in efforts to build an Arabic and Vietnamese bilingual/bicultural pathway? JCRC has attempted to paint a picture of AROC as a “hate organization”. As such, the organizations involved in this bilingual/bicultural pathway have had to redirect their time and energy to respond to these claims. Unfortunately, the politics that are emerging from this debate may serve as an example to SFUSD students & families, of how wealth and power can dictate policy. Conversely, this can also be an example of how when communities of color stand up against racism those entrusted with their democratic institutions will stand up with them against bullies with money and power.

Let us define the sides a little more clearly: On one side you have an organization with power, money and influence. Specifically, the JCRC. This is a majority white, wealthy, religious group with a veneer of secularism. This organization has the backing and support of a foreign government, Israel.

On the other side of this argument you have the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) and Vietnamese Youth Development Center (VYDC), both with a proven track records of working with SFUSD, the city of San Francisco and community based organizations on issues of language access, poverty, immigration and closing the achievement gap for some of our most challenged students in SFUSD. They primarily serve families and students struggling with poverty, language access, immigration issues, soft and aggressive bigotry, hatred and terrorism similar to what African-American, Latino and Asian-American communities in the United States face today.

JCRC attacks any organizations that are critical of the government of Israel and uses economic and media pressure to force organizations and institutions into compliance. In fact, as part of its program, JCRC aims to challenge any Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) work opposing Israeli Apartheid in defense of Palestinian human rights. *They are now using their power to weigh in on educational matters and bullying the Board of Education to bring their politics into the policy process.* They want the Board of Education to break ties with AROC and VYDC who are doing important work with our families and students, to help improve their educational outcomes and accomplish the work that the district talks about. Specifically, providing translation, mentorship, academic support and after-school programming that is culturally relevant and culturally competent.

**We are asking that AROC & VYDC continue to be able to support the development of language pathways for the students of SFUSD.**

AROC and VYDC’s work serving SFUSD students, while holding a critical lens against racism and oppression, is done in the same spirit that can be found in other SFUSD partners and organizations: Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, Filipino Community Center, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Glide Memorial, and Teachers 4 Social Justice. Their anti-racism and anti-oppression work is similar to that of the Civil Rights Movement and efforts to end apartheid in South Africa.

AROC does not engage in anti-Semitic action. Teachers 4 Social Justice does not engage in anti-Semitic actions. We are anti-racist organizations. As such, we are anti-Zionist, just as we are anti-Imperialist and anti-Apartheid. Are we hate groups? No. The truth is that we hate racism and any –ist and -ism that seeks to dehumanize, silence or harm people in the name of government, security, entitlement, money, power or control. We hate American racism, hegemony and imperialism that, for people of color, are historically synonymous with the United States and Israeli Government’s policies and practices. While we are not all Jewish, we have Jewish partners in our struggles (Jews for Peace and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network). Together we criticized the Israeli government’s occupation of Palestine. We criticize our own

government when it works against the rights we, and those who came before us have fought and struggled for and believe should be upheld.

SFUSD has powerful conversations about equity because there are still many shortcomings in our schools. We have many good reasons to disagree with certain decisions that are made by the Board of Education. We sometimes disagree with each of the individuals on the Board, but T4SJ is unequivocal in our opposition to and critique of the way the current system as a whole destroys the self-worth and crushes the spirit of the young people in SFUSD. This is an exercise of our democracy and should be welcomed.

Even with this critique and efforts to hold the district accountable, educators, parents and students expect T4SJ to participate in the power and politics of schools, because we have a vision and mission that addresses issues of oppression, and we seek to build an education system based on ideas of equity and liberation. People of color who understand education issues deeply lead Teachers 4 Social Justice, AROC and VYDC. We push our education values because we live these values and we are stakeholders who are materially impacted by the decisions that are made in our district. It is our people who suffer when our values are silenced or ignored. It is our children that are immediately criminalized, and drop out of school at alarming rates.

We are asking that the board not allow JCRC, a private (non-education based) outside organization to dictate policy or convince the Board of Education to take action against AROC, VYDC or any other organization for exercising its free speech rights and standing up against oppression and racism.

We believe the Board's consideration of JCRC's position is because of the money and power at play. Rather we worry the board may be more concerned about their personal relations and economic impacts from the political fallout of disagreeing and not complying with the demands of JCRC. We know the Board of Education did not consider taking on JCRC's political position because there is a genuine effort to sort out questions of racism or hateful behavior insinuated to be involved in this language pathway work.

If the finger were pointed at you, as individuals, and you were called racist because of what you said or even did (especially considering the current dismal outcomes for African-American students in SFUSD), you would not resign or vote to remove yourselves from the process. You would engage in the process and refute those claims. The same value that keeps you at the table and in public service should move you to embrace AROC and anyone else willing to work in service of our young people, not target them for having different political beliefs regarding a foreign superpower or its influence here in the Bay Area.

No people of Jewish descent in our schools or anywhere have been attacked or harmed in any material way due to any of the work of any of our organizations, or due to our political positions. If folks from JCRC feel that their beliefs are challenged, we support that. We believe that all groups should be responsible to having their beliefs examined and challenged. We hope that more people will support the boycott, divestment movement and sanctions of the Israeli government, until its apartheid policies and practices change.

We call on all elected officials and department heads, non-profits, community-based organizations and businesses to stand up and say San Francisco believes in a diversity of voices. We ask that the Board support the SF free speech movement by saying no to the kind of bullying JCRC is doing. We ask that the Board say no to racism, and yes to working with community-based organizations in a way that is principled, has integrity, and respects their perspectives while remaining focused on the work of serving our young people and their families.

We call on everyone to learn about and join the work of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement toward the apartheid government of Israel. We call on everyone to do what they can to stop the bully tactics of organizations, like JCRC, while diminishing their influence and ability to punish groups that support ending racism and imperialism here and abroad.

Thank you,  
Teachers 4 Social Justice

Teachers 4 Social Justice is a grassroots nonprofit teacher support and development organization. We organize teachers and community based educators and implement programs and projects that develop empowering learning environments, more equitable access to resources and power, and realizing a just and caring culture. Our mission is to provide opportunities for selftransformation, leadership, and community building to educators in order to affect meaningful change in the classroom, school, community and society. [www.t4sj.org](http://www.t4sj.org)