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Dr. Christine Ackerman  
Superintendent  
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**Re: Concerns about Potential First Amendment Violations and Other  
Discriminatory Actions targeting Palestinian American students**

Dear Dr. Ackerman:

I am writing on behalf of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the United States' largest Arab American civil rights organization. We were founded in 1980 by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk and are based in Washington, D.C. ADC has received alarming reports about repeated discrimination by Chappaqua Central School District (CCSD) against Palestinian and Arab students. We are shocked by the discriminatory actions and censorious overreach that have been brought to our attention.

During the spring of 2024, CCSD received complaints from politically motivated individuals campaigning to remove the book titled *Young Palestinians Speak* from school libraries. CCSD immediately responded by enlisting "a team of faculty members" who unilaterally chose to ban this book from the middle school under the pretext "that the author presents a viewpoint that requires a foundational understanding of author intent and perspective...and historical context which middle schoolers are less likely to have" than high school students. Such blatant verbal gymnastics should offend anyone who cares about equality in public education. CCSD does not deny that middle school students have adequate historical context to understand the viewpoint of Palestinian children living under occupation; only that older students would understand better – which can be said about virtually every topic taught in school.

*Young Palestinians Speak* is an internationally acclaimed book written by Palestinian children and teens living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. It reflects the horrors of living under an apartheid state where their rights, humanity and existence are all denied. Published Simon and Schuster highlights the following excerpt (emphasis added) from a review of the book:

*There is no shortage of information published about the conflicts in the Middle East, but this book offers an uncommon perspective on Israeli-Palestinian relations. It tells the **story of several Palestinian children** living in the West Bank. The introduction explains the loss of Palestinian land in 1948, focusing especially on the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993 that continue to leave the final status of the West Bank in limbo. Poverty, **lack of access to education**, demolition and seizure of property, and abuses of civil rights by Israeli troops are just some of the **broad themes discussed in interviews conducted with young people in nine different towns** throughout Palestinian lands. Readers may be surprised at some of the mundane **similarities between themselves and the subjects of the book**, but the harsh realities of a place where military checkpoints and separation walls are everywhere are undeniable. **Robinson and Young assert that if the problems of the Middle East are ever to be fully grasped empathy and understanding must start with young people.***

The entire objective of *Young Palestinians Speak* is to allow young people in other parts of the world to understand what young Palestinians are experiencing. In fact, publisher, [Simon and Schuster rates this book as appropriate for students as young as Fourth Grade](#). The ability of younger children to understand similar feelings, goals, and reactions is evident when they react with empathy, concern, and compassion over Holocaust literature such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* – a story that has impacted all of us who are committed to civil rights and social justice. [CCSD not only includes The Diary of Anne Frank among its literary offerings for middle school students, it has designated that book as an “anchor text” for 8th grade middle school students](#). ADC applauds CCSD for teaching the history of Jewish suffering; but we question why you deny the ongoing history of Palestinian suffering.

CCSD's decision to ban *Young Palestinians Speak* from middle school is clearly rooted in censorship of the Palestinian perspective rather than concern over an inability of middle school students to understand its context. By banning this book and the stories within it, CCSD has not only endorsed the illegal occupation of Palestine, but it has also denied the rights, humanity and identity of its Palestinian students and community members. This is offensive not only to Palestinians, but to all who value learning from different perspectives, including pro-Palestinian Jewish students. By eliminating alternative perspectives, CCSD is force feeding one politically motivated narrative to its student body – that Palestinian identity, history and humanity are not valuable.



ADC understands that shortly after CCSD banned *Young Palestinians Speak*, these affected families communicated with CCSD to note that the number of Zionist-centered books greatly outnumbers those that portray Palestinian voices with humanity and dignity. The Zionist-centered books require no less foundational understanding than *Young Palestinians Speak*. CCSD is applying different standards of acceptability based on the political opinion being expressed. Indeed, the individuals advocating for the ban of *Young Palestinians Speak* were clearly focused on their politics as Zionists, not their religious beliefs as Jews. The individuals demanding book banning claimed that the books reflecting the experiences of Palestinian children “are pushing false narratives and helping to feed the growing hate in this community.” These individuals offered no evidence of false narratives; on the contrary, they were only pushing the false narrative that children in Palestine are not living under occupation – a fact recognized by the entire world.

The racist behavior of multiple CCSD parents and community members was again on full display at CCSD’s March 2025 International Day. Families from diverse minority backgrounds hosted a Palestinian table to show support for and celebrate Palestinian ethnic and cultural heritage with the greater CCSD community. Once again, Anti-Palestinian members of the CCSD community took center stage to publicly express outrage that Palestinian identity was being celebrated. They even doxed individuals associated with the Palestinian table on a well followed Facebook page.

The Palestinian table at CCSD’s International Day included beautiful symbols of Palestinian ethnicity and culture: the watermelon, which symbolizes Palestinian identity because the watermelon-colored Palestinian flag was outlawed by Israel under occupation; olive oil and pita bread, which are native foods grown for centuries in the land of historic Palestine. Ironically, these facts might be better understood if children were allowed to learn about Palestinian history and experience it through books like *Young Palestinians Speak*. ADC is appalled that a watermelon bowl and olive oil would generate so much hatred and controversy in your community; and we are shocked that CCSD has chosen to side with those who feign fear over fruit as a means to censor the ethnic, historical and cultural expression of an oppressed people. Rather than silence the blatant racism, CCSD continues to treat the anti-Palestinian racists as though they are the victims – further enabling their racist tirades.

During the March 12, 2025, CCSD Board of Education (Board) meeting, Board members took the unusual step of making individual comments before permitting anyone else to speak. Each Board member shared a singularly Zionist narrative, without any empathy or understanding of the Palestinian experience. CCSD and the Board made no efforts to learn about Palestinian culture or items displayed on the Palestinian table. Rather, they equated the display of culture to violence,



referencing October 7th and invoking tireless, hateful tropes that the community and CCSD embrace all too readily. When comments were finally permitted, Arab-American, Muslim, and other parents expressed deep concern that CCSD was enabling racist hate against Palestinians. Still, CCSD and its Board failed to condemn the racism against Palestinians.

Palestinian Americans are trying to call attention to their history as their people are simultaneously being erased. Instead of calling attention to this reality, you refer to it as a “complicated and complex time in our community.” Those words echo the sentiment of the silent masses throughout history. The genocides of Native Americans in this country, Rwandans in Africa, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and Jews in Europe were not complicated or complex times; they were times when the masses remained silent. The genocide in Palestine is no different.

While children in Palestine are being subjected to genocide, ethnic cleansing and starvation, CCSD has decided to deny the children of Chappaqua the opportunity to learn about what is happening – not unlike the banning of books denying the crimes against Jewish people in Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When you deny victims of oppression the opportunity to tell their stories, you add another layer of injustice and foment further hatred and bias.

CCSD’s actions raise serious First Amendment and Title VI concerns. Palestinian American students have every right to express pride in their culture, including sharing books and symbols of their ethnicity and culture. “Students [and] teachers [do not] shed their constitutional rights to freedom of expression at the schoolhouse gate.” *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 506 (1969). Moreover, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of shared ancestry in federally-funded programs, including schools.

Furthermore, to the extent that such treatment applies to censorship of the perspective of Palestinian, the school may also be in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause. We wonder, for example, if the same sort of bias would be tolerated against Native American or African American students if a segment of the CCSD community wanted to ban books about their painful histories. The First Amendment does not allow such censorship, and the Fourteenth Amendment does not permit such discriminatory application of rules based on the race or national origin of students.