

We have sent the letter to the Board on Wednesday, January 17. We thank all signatories that this letter received. At this moment, we will prioritize updating the letter with SUHSD affiliate signatories.

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January 12, 2024

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Jacob Yuryev, Student Trustee
Sequoia Union High School District

Dear Members of the Board,

We the undersigned mourn the loss of all life since October 7th, 2023, including the attack that took [1200](#) Israeli lives as well as the ongoing violence that has taken over [20,000](#) Palestinian lives and displaced two million more in its aftermath, with widespread [famine and disease](#) imminent for survivors. We are struggling to process, grieve, and hold our own feelings and those who are close to us as we navigate the stream of updates, clarifications, and misinformation about the violence in Israel and Palestine. Yet, as always, we can't help but think about our students—what they know, what they are sharing, and what they are seeing on their news feed about these events—and more importantly about how we can facilitate collective conversation together: across identity, learning abilities, and budding political viewpoints.

It is with our students in mind that we, as educators who are uniquely positioned to understand the pedagogy and the intricacies of teaching in a fraught political climate, unequivocally stand in solidarity with our colleague Chloe Gentile-Montgomery and her intention to engage her students in conversation about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

To guide students in contextualizing the events and practicing critical media literacy, two teachers at Menlo-Atherton High School delivered a lesson on analyzing competing narratives of the Israel-Palestine conflict. One teacher in particular, Chloe Gentile-Montgomery, has been a target of organized harassment. The fallout from the

singular lesson has included accusations of anti-Semitism, [a public analysis](#) naming her as “unqualified to teach about the Holocaust,” a threatened lawsuit against the district, a [petition](#), [public calls for SUHSD to take measures against her](#), and a multitude of personal attacks and patterns of harassment via email, physical mail, and posters on the door of her classroom. The harassment and repercussions that she continues to face after her lesson on Israel and Palestine send a clear and chilling message to educators in this district: do not teach about Palestine.

The campaign against Ms. Montgomery is not a good-faith effort to give genuine feedback, to be in conversation, or to support teachers in addressing the current situation in Israel and Palestine with students. Instead, it is an attempt to instill fear among staff and censor academic discussion on a topic that students have every right to learn about. As teachers, we know what improving our curriculum looks like. We are continuously dedicated to growing and deepening our practice: we routinely solicit student feedback, we attend professional development programming, and we collaborate with other educators to supplement our curriculum. Teachers need grace and good faith when responding to ongoing events while differentiating for all students.

It is important to contextualize these particular attacks on one lesson and one teacher within a larger campaign against Ethnic Studies and educators of color. One of the organizers of the petition against Ms. Montgomery, the Alliance for Constructive Ethnic Studies, espouses a [distorted view of Ethnic Studies](#) and recently pressured neighboring Mountain View Los Altos District to [terminate a contract](#) to provide professional development to Ethnic Studies teachers. When a coalition of educators, students, and alumni proposed the 9th grade Ethnic Studies course in October 2020, community members immediately raised concerns about anti-Semitism. However, these critiques were based on the conflation of early drafts of CA Model Curriculum with the SUHSD specific proposal and curriculum. The current attacks on Ethnic Studies are not new, and have been brewing since the Ethnic Studies proposal in 2020. This moment is larger than Chloe—if not her, it was only a matter of time before another teacher would come under focused scrutiny.

Teaching about Palestine and Israel in SUHSD is not unprecedented; for years, freshmen across the district studied Israel and Palestine in the 9th grade World Studies course. In Ethnic Studies, students should be able to have the opportunity to process and unpack ongoing current events. According to the [CA Department of Education History/Social Science Standards](#), “ethnic studies seeks to empower all students to engage socially and politically and to think critically about the world around them.” Students are already reading and watching the unfolding crisis in Israel and Palestine on social media; thus it is essential to address the ongoing conflict in social studies classrooms.

Furthermore, there are larger campaigns to [shut down any critique of the Israeli government and its policies](#). Terms such as settler colonialism, indigeneity, decolonization, apartheid, diaspora, ethnic cleansing, and displacement are terms essential to Ethnic Studies and social studies classrooms generally. Yet, these phrases, when associated with Israel or Palestine, immediately bring teachers under scrutiny. The history classroom has always been a space to examine historical violence. The history classroom has always been where students question, critique, and evaluate state narratives and policies. Why should Israel be the exception?

Ms. Montgomery's attackers are fighting for an academic climate that would deny students dialogue with each other about events that they are seeing unfold on TikTok and Instagram. We believe in classrooms where such conversations are necessary, however difficult they are. We must model to our students how to interrogate the roots of violence through history. We must support teachers when they attempt to make connections to current events instead of silencing them.

We owe it to our students to prepare them to be global citizens by teaching them about the [ongoing occupation](#)¹ and the humanitarian [crisis](#) in Gaza. Simultaneously, we know our Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, Arab, and Palestinian students may draw on their own experiences and connections to the history of this region. We know it is essential to approach this history with respect, care, and nuance, all while making material accessible to all learners. We teach our students that every text we encounter has bias; that we must assess sources, interrogate government policies, and analyze multiple narratives to critically engage with current events and history.

In the presence of organized opposition against Chloe, we write to support her efforts to train students in critical media literacy during an ongoing information war, and we condemn litigation and harassment aimed at censoring educators. It is our hope that teachers are given the tools, support, and encouragement to facilitate courageous, caring, and humanizing conversations about current events without facing harassment. As Judith Butler writes, "At universities, we question the question for its premises. If we lose that critical capacity from our classrooms and from public life, we have lost our mission, and we have failed ourselves and our students."

To add your name, go to the [Google form](#).

¹<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/report-says-perpetual-israeli-occupation-of-palestinian-areas-is-the-root-of-tensions>

SUHSD affiliated signatories*:

**The following list is organized alphabetically and not in the order of received signatures*

1. Jaime Abdilla, Carlmont High School, Instructor
2. Pablo Aguilera, SUHSD Equity, Diversity & Inclusion TOSA
3. Ann Akey, WHS
4. Derek Ang, East Palo Alto Academy
5. Jeremy Arey, former Menlo-Atherton High School employee, Culturally Restorative Learning Supports, LLC
6. Karyn Arle, Sequoia High School
7. Natalie Baldaccini, Sequoia High School
8. Kathleen Banister, US History and IB History of the Americas Teacher, Sequoia High School
9. Dalia Barrientos, SUHSD alum
10. Chris Beetley-Hagler, Redwood High School
11. Paul Bellar, Carlmont High School
12. Danny Bliss, Sequoia High School
13. Jedd Bloom, Sequoia High School
14. Andrew Bohn, Menlo-Atherton High School
15. Darcy Book, English teacher at Woodside High School
16. Kari Brown, SUHSD/Menlo-Atherton High School
17. Sherinda Bryant, Culturally Restorative Learning Supports LLC, Founder/CEO
18. Jen Buchanan, SUHSD
19. Leslie Burndon, Carlmont High School
20. Katya Burton, Carlmont High School
21. Mallory Byrne, Menlo-Atherton High School
22. Talia Cain, Sequoia High School
23. Salvadora Q Calonje, Integrated ELD Instructional Coach
24. Jeff Camarillo, Menlo-Atherton High School Alum
25. Natalie Campos, Sequoia High School alum
26. Janette Campos, Sequoia High School teacher
27. Ben Canning, Sequoia High School
28. Jesus Cervantes, Woodside High School
29. Erin Cespedes, Sequoia High School
30. Megan Chatham, English Teacher at Sequoia High School
31. Kari Cheng, SUHSD
32. Karina Chin, Sequoia High School
33. Cat Cole, TIDE Academy
34. Karol-Ann Coleman, Sequoia High School

35. Laura Collier
36. Kristin Coronado, SUHSD
37. Juan Cortez, Counselor at Woodside High School
38. Andrew Cruz, Intervention Counselor Redwood High School
39. Dayna Danielson, Sequoia High School
40. Donna Dela Calzada, Redwood High School
41. Jeff Dequina, Carlmont
42. Emily DeVoe, Sequoia High School
43. Melissa Díaz, Sequoia High School Ethnic Studies and World History Teacher
44. Christina Dobbins, East Palo Alto Academy
45. Kelly Dolan, Woodside High School (SUHSD)
46. Juan Duran, Sequoia High School Ethnic Studies EML and Gov/Economics EML teacher
47. Debolina Dutta, Sequoia High School
48. Alan Eaton, Woodside High School
49. David Edel Woodside High School
50. Joseph Ezrati, WHS Science Teacher
51. Jonda Farris de Gámez, SUHSD Educator
52. Kayla Funk, SUSHD alum
53. Magdalena Galvan, Sequoia High School
54. Davina Gazulla, Sequoia High School
55. Caitlin Gilbert, Sequoia High School alum
56. Ashley Gray, Sequoia High School
57. Susan Gold, Carlmont High School
58. Lucia Gonzalez, East Palo Alto Academy
59. Greg Gruszynski, World History and U.S. History teacher, Woodside High School
60. Grant Guzman, Woodside High School Teacher
61. Laetitia Haffray (Kuttan), Sequoia High School
62. Christy Halstead, Sequoia High School, Math and AVID teacher
63. Katherine Hansen, SUHSD alum
64. Mark Helfenberger, Menlo-Atherton High School
65. Taja Henderson, SUHSD Equity, Diversity & Inclusion TOSA
66. Claire Heritier-Kerby, Sequoia High School
67. Norma Hernandez, former staff at Menlo-Atherton High School
68. Melissa Hero, Carlmont High School
69. Austin Hunt, Menlo-Atherton High School
70. Allison Hyde, Sequoia High School
71. Mattias Johansson, East Palo Alto Academy
72. Abdulhadi Kaddoura, Woodside HS
73. Aline Kaprive, SUHSD

74. Liz Kaufman Menlo Atherton High School
75. Anne Ken, Woodside High School
76. Tanya Kennedy-DeGrazia, Woodside STARS teacher
77. Abbie Korman, Menlo-Atherton, SUHSD
78. Nancy Ku, Sequoia High School
79. Alton Lee, Woodside High School
80. Myriam Leon, SUHSD alum
81. Roberta Love, Sequoia High School
82. Jade Lopez, Sequoia High School alum
83. Andrea Marquez, SUHSD alum
84. Julie Marten, Woodside High School, DVPA
85. Danielle Martin, East Palo Alto Academy High School
86. Carlos A. Martínez, SUHSD
87. Julia Masur, Sequoia High School alum
88. Caren McDonald, East Palo Alto Academy
89. Michelle McKee, SUHSD ISP Teacher (previously a Social Studies Teacher at Carlmont)
90. Cary Milia, Menlo-Atherton High School
91. Victoria Mitchell, Sequoia High School
92. Mike Molieri, Menlo-Atherton High School
93. Elias Mooring, Woodside High School
94. Fidel Mora, Sequoia Union High School District
95. Rosey Morearty, Sequoia High School alum
96. Tony Mueller
97. Carlos Navarrete
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112. Mark Reibstein, Woodside High School
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119. Gregory J Schmid, Sequoia High School
120. Stacy Schmidt Wenzel, Sequoia High School
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122. Marissa Sevudredre, Sequoia High School
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138. Lia Williams, East Palo Alto Academy
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141. Matthew Wohl, Sequoia High School
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146. Karin D. Zarcone, Sequoia High School Social Studies Teacher

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200. Joemy Ito-Gates, Japanese American Families for Justice + Bay Area Ethnic Studies Educator
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262. Kathryn Snyder
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283. Anonymous, Palo Alto Unified School District
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