



July 27, 2018

Superintendent David Fleishman
Office of the Superintendent
100 Walnut Street, Room 212
Newton, MA 02460

Dear Superintendent Fleishman:

Thank you for your response of July 3, 2018, regarding questions that we had asked concerning the “Middle East Day” that was held at Newton North High School last month. We appreciate the clarification as to the nature of the program and the additional explanations you provided regarding the process by which it was developed.

And yet, while we recognize the good intentions by which the Middle East Day was initiated, and understand that the original goal was to include speakers who would present diverse views and perspectives, we are disappointed that this important goal was not achieved. In particular, we find it disappointing that instead of showing a film from the Seeds of Peace Organization and coordinating with the “Jewish club” to bring a Middle East studies professor from Brandeis University, as was initially intended according to the correspondence we reviewed, the program as it was finalized included the screening of a film from the Boston Palestine Film Festival, and no outside speaker to present on the Israeli perspective.

A brief internet search and vetting process could have alerted the faculty assisting the team of students that the Boston Palestine Film Festival is a program of the Middle East Charitable and Cultural Society Inc., which also supports the website Electronic Intifada, a website which regularly publishes anti-Israel and anti-Semitic content, and whose co-founder and executive director Ali Abunimah, is a leading advocate of BDS (boycotts, divestments and sanctions) campaigns which delegitimize Israel’s right to exist.

As we have discussed before, we recognize that the Middle East, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, is a complex subject to teach. The continuously changing landscape and political situation in the region necessitates using up-to-date materials from scholarly and credible sources when presenting materials to students, and it is critical to ensure that proper context is provided, but of equal importance is the quality and credibility of said materials.

We believe it is important for all schools to have in place a transparent process that ensures adherence to this standard. As such, we are pleased that you plan to create and disseminate a clear document to explain to the larger school community about how and why the schools teach about complex and controversial topics. We hope that it will allow for clearer adherence to this policy in planning future programs, as well.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any service in this process or any others. We would welcome serving as resource for the Newton Public Schools and look forward to continuing our work together.

Sincerely,



Robert O. Trestan
Regional Director
Anti-Defamation League, New England



Jeremy Burton
Executive Director
Jewish Community Relation Council of Greater Boston