



Advancing social justice and building power with working-class Vietnamese and immigrant communities in Orange County.

Garden Grove, CA 92843 | www.vietrise.org | general@vietrise.org | @vietriseoc

May 22, 2023

Santa Ana Unified School District
School Board of Education
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear SAUSD Board of Education,

VietRISE implores the Santa Ana Unified School District to maintain the Ethnic Studies curriculum approved by the School Board, which includes Palestine and Arab American Studies. This curriculum provides invaluable history on the plight and struggles of the Palestinian people and Arab Americans to seek self-determination and sovereignty against the military occupation of Palestine by Zionist settler-colonialism.

As an organization advancing social justice and building power with working-class Vietnamese and immigrant communities in Orange County, we have seen firsthand how impactful and empowering it is for students of color to learn about their community's history, which includes how historical actors and community members exercised their agency in shaping their identities and in forming their community in the United States. In addition, it is important for students to be taught how the legacies of colonization, war, and intervention have created modern nation-states and resulted in the centuries-long mass migrations of people throughout the world and to have competent educators guide them through the process of wrestling with these histories and realities. Removing Palestinian history and Arab American Studies is not only a disservice to the students that you swore to serve but also an attempt at erasing history, which contradicts the very purpose of Ethnic Studies, which is used to focus on the history of minorities in the United States and unveil and challenge dominant narratives of institutional and structural power.

Education should be a tool to question, expose, and complicate the simplified facts and narratives fed to us by the world around us, and schools should be in the business of teaching students to critically think. Yet our educational system has been hijacked by politics attempting to control, regulate, and destroy knowledge. The most blatant example, in this case, is the act of falsely equating Anti-Zionism with Anti-Semitism. "Lobbyist groups' attempts to falsely equate anti-semitism with criticism of Israel represents a grave threat to academic freedom and the fight for Palestinian freedom and equality. It sets a precedent for other school districts and encourages the silencing of educators, students, academics, and activists around the nation. Pro-Israel interest groups should not be arbiters of what gets included in Ethnic Studies Curriculum. The false conflation of legitimate criticism of Israel as anti-semitism is a tactic that is opposed by many Jewish organizations, both within the United States and internationally. They downplay the main source of anti-semitism in the United States, which is white nationalism. **We urge the SAUSD to reject this notion that legitimate criticism of Israel is anti-semitic.**"

Although Vietnamese history has similarly been gutted and turned into a savior-rescue story within U.S. History classes and public history, Ethnic Studies helps rectify this harmful narrative by complicating U.S. involvement in Vietnam and centers the agency of Vietnamese actors in building their country, community, and identity. This critical lens on history should, without a doubt, be extended to the study of Palestine and Arab American history. We echo and uplift the words of our comrades and allies at Palestinian Youth Movement: "The attack on Palestine is an attack on Ethnic Studies in its entirety: Our liberation is connected, so are our forces of oppression. Therefore efforts of erasure here will replicate elsewhere."

Once again, we urge the Santa Ana Unified School District to maintain the Ethnic Studies curriculum approved by the School Board which includes Palestine and Arab American Studies. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Vincent Tran
Organizing Director
VietRISE