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Participating Organizations

American Muslims for Palestine
Appalachian Peace Education Center
Arab American Association of Central Virginia
Community for Justice in Palestine & Israel of the Alliance of Baptists
Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality
Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church - USA
Jewish Voice for Peace
National Arab American Women's Association
New Dominion PAC
Northern Virginians for Peace & Justice
Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace
Plowshares Peace & Justice Center
Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine
Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East, Northern Virginia Chapter
United Methodists for Kairos Response
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

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Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander, Ph.D.
Chair, Standards and Standards Review Subcommittee
African American History Education Commission
Robert Russa Moton Museum
900 Griffin Blvd.
Farmville, VA 23901

Dear Dr. Newby-Alexander,

Thank you for your excellent contribution to the Commission and particularly your recommendations on the Standards Subcommittee.

Just to give an understanding of where I am coming from, my own background is in International Relations and French Cultural Studies with a graduate degree in Islamic Studies focusing on Islamic Law. I have been a professor at the community college level and worked in training around Racial Reconciliation and Trauma Healing with various nonprofits and NGO's in Richmond and abroad. I'm a founding Board of Directors member for the International Institute for Human Security while also working locally with Coming To The Table and the VA Coalition for Human Rights (a consortium of 17 groups and representing 8000 + Virginians). I am a passionate parent of children who are in the Chesterfield County schools and have seen my fair share of discrimination and bias in academic opportunities and instruction, as well as excellent model teaching and care in our schools. I'm here to offer some feedback and one particular proposal today.

I'd first like to remark on the point made more than once today regarding the need to train teachers on how to instruct in such a way that gets students to make broader connections and not to look at topics and subject matters in isolation. Teachers need to be trained in teaching a connected model, not a manner that is linear, or parade of isolated subjects. [The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights has offered material in the public comment (found in the Dropbox) that is more specific to this issue.]

Additionally, Mr. Dickerson made a comment earlier about increasing the focusing in teaching on developing skills and using those "as a vehicle to teach the content". However, when there is limited or inaccurate material being taught, skills cannot rectify such an obstacle to quality education.

Admittedly, as Testing is content heavy focused and because classroom curriculum is driven by the SOL's, it would seem it is all the more imperative to improve the subject matter of those SOLs. From what I have heard at today's meeting, it appears there is an awareness that content needs to be streamlined and cleaned up. As a parent I have seen there is a lot of material that is superfluous and inaccurate while other critical material that is not sufficiently covered or is left out. I was happy to see you, yourself, raise this point, Dr. Newby-Alexander.

As for what I would like to propose today, in light of what I have heard during this meeting about the need for cross curriculum teaching, I suspect the Commission is able to be sympathetic to my serious concerns. I'd like to request that a new Standard Of Learning be created, or existing ones be revamped to tie in World History, African American History (Slave History) and modern issues on the legacy of exploitation and oppression — such an SOL would be on the broader and vast topic of **Colonialism**. It is an expansive and incredibly significant subject area that is under explored within the SOLs and classroom curriculum. This, in spite of its far reaching and multifold repercussions and impact in all segments of human life across the world, shaping economies and politics etc.

In the 18 years that I have been tangentially or directly involved in Public School education system, I have not seen this topic mentioned very much. Indeed, I am rather shocked at how little light has been shed on the critical connection between Colonialism and Imperialism in teaching about Slave History, racism and current political global and US affairs. Please note, I am not asking that every detail and fact be taught. However, realistically, I do not know how an American student can be assumed to be a well-educated and well-rounded Citizen of the world (not just America) when they lack the ability to know and connect such a historical and highly significant **global** phenomenon to America's past and present.

As any educator and academic will know, in teaching about one model of oppression, segregation, and human rights violations on a systemic and structural level (and teaching it well) one can then help students draw the necessary parallels to understand the multiple other struggles against oppression, whether it's the English over the Irish, the Burmese over Rohingya or Israelis over Palestinians. Drawing parallels fosters critical thinking skills and in fact, would help train teachers and students *alike* to think in terms of a Non-Eurocentric worldview, develop a broader Cultural Consciousness, and awareness of humanity and pervasive human security issues that abound in every community across this Earth.

I really hope that this idea to create an SOL that gives due attention to Colonialism and its complex and profound role in World and US history up until the modern period, will be seriously considered with all the possible positive results it can offer to improve learning outcomes *and* professional development for our instructors.

Thank you for your consideration,

Anjum Ali
Education Committee
Virginia Coalition for Human Rights