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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

December 11, 2019

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,

We write to follow-up on our letter of November 26 in which we detailed our suggestions for enrichment of the World History and Geography Standards of Learning. We write now to suggest edits/enrichment to Virginia and U.S. History standards and to the standards review process itself.

We believe that American history is taught in a parallel track to the history of American slavery and that the former cannot be meaningful comprehended without full integration with the latter. As a result, students are unable to draw connections between past events and the present struggles for racial equality. They are unable to contextualize how the world they inhabit now was shaped by the institution of slavery and white supremacy then.

Standards Edits/Enrichments

For these ideas, we have relied heavily on the publications of Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Titled **Teaching Hard History: A Framework for Teaching American Slavery**, this document now comes in two separate resources: one for Grades K-5 <https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/k-5-framework> and one for Grades 6-12 <https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/6-12-framework>. With over 100 lesson outlines, quizzes, a text library with over 100 primary sources, podcasts, and videos highlighting the ten key concepts every graduating American high schooler should know about slavery, this teacher resource will provide the teacher with structured help to instruct with the latest scholarship on slavery.

As your subcommittee is tasked with reviewing the history standards themselves, we recommend you embed this report's ten key concepts in the standards.

1. Slavery, which was practiced by Europeans prior to their arrival in the Americas, was important to all of the colonial powers and existed in all of the European North American colonies.
2. Slavery and the slave trade were central to the development and growth of the economy across British North America and, later, the United States.
3. Protections for slavery were embedded in the founding documents; enslavers dominated the federal government, Supreme court and Senate from 1787 to 1860.
4. "Slavery was an institution of power," designed to create profit for the enslavers and break the will of the enslaved and was a relentless quest for profit abetted by racism.
5. Enslaved people resisted the efforts of their enslavers to reduce them to commodities in both revolutionary and everyday ways.
6. The experience of slavery varied depending on time, location, crop, labor performed, size of slaveholding and gender.
7. **Slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.**
8. Slavery shaped the fundamental beliefs of Americans about race and whiteness, and white supremacy was both a product and legacy of slavery.
9. Enslaved and free people of African descent had a profound impact on American culture, producing leaders and literacy, artistic and folk tradition that continue to influence the nation.
10. By knowing how to read and interpret the sources that tell the story of American slavery, we gain insight into some of what enslaving and enslaved Americans aspired to, created, thought and desired.

In its survey of Virginia History SOLs, the original SPLC report titled **Teaching Hard History** by Kate Shuster <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/teaching-hard-history-american-slavery> listed the following concerns:

- Slavery is first mentioned in the second-grade curriculum framework when Abraham Lincoln is described as the "president of the United States who helped to free American slaves." Before his inclusion in a list of heroes, students have already learned about Martin Luther King, Jr. for two years and have no context for understanding that slavery even existed.
- Enslaved Africans are mentioned in the Virginia history standards without a discussion of the nature and extent of slavery in Virginia.
- Although Virginia's standards do note that Africans arrived in Virginia against their will in 1619, enabling the growth of the tobacco economy, Virginia's framework is oddly passive on the issue of slavery. We see a history of slavery without enslavers—a sanitized version stripped of the everyday and systemic violence of slavery. It is also worth noting that in this standard it's the Virginia colony that "became dependent on slavery," not the people of Virginia.
- The standards and frameworks do identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War. However, the most comprehensive discussion of the wrongs of slavery comes in the context of the coverage of abolitionism. This makes it seem as if the abolition of slavery was

inevitable and historically necessary—an assumption that is not borne out by the marginalization of that movement. Finally, the Virginia standards make it seem that slavery was an exclusively southern institution.

- In sum, Virginia state standards only address Key Concept # 7 (Slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.) **It is missing entirely Key Concepts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.**

Standards Review Process

As regards the standards review process, we believe there is room for improvement— especially in the two areas of public notification of the review process and of selection of review team members. We understand in the last cycle that 175 applicants were selected by geography, race, gender, and years of experience to serve as potential members of this team. Our concern is that these persons, although competent in their field of expertise, may not be qualified to undertake the task of rewriting standards of history. Yes, there is an external committee of experts to review these changes; however, the product produced in 2017 contained only one of the ten key concepts listed above. For your interest, I include links to the Virginia process http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2014/01_jan/agenda_items/item_j.pdf and the Maryland process <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/05212019/TabG-SocialStudiesStandards.pdf>.

And, finally, thank you, Dr. Newby-Alexander for raising the quality of K-12 history instruction and of the national dialogue about race, racism and racial reconciliation.

Sincerely yours,

Kathy Drinkard
Co-chair, Education Committee
Virginia Coalition for Human Rights

Jeanne Trabulsi
Co-chair, Education Committee
Virginia Coalition for Human Rights