

November 3, 2003

Ms. Carol Comeau, Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska 99504

RE: Middle Eastern Studies

Dear Carol:

We are writing you today to alert you to a very serious education threat that may be happening without your knowledge, to help avoid the embarrassing repercussions that are sure to unfold if something is not done very quickly, and to work with you to make sure that what is presented to Anchorage school children is accurate and balanced.

We are sure you will be surprised to learn that current so called "Middle Eastern" studies\*, soon to be accredited within the district, employs multi-media material and a text which contain historical misinformation, revisionist history, geographical misrepresentations, anti-Semitism, and religious and political indoctrination. It has not undergone normal curriculum review in the Anchorage School District.

ASD school teachers have been consistently solicited to purchase this text, The Arab World Studies Notebook, edited by Audrey Shabbas, for use in Anchorage classrooms (produced by the Middle East Policy Council, a pressure group based in Washington, D.C., formerly called the Arab American Affairs Council). We've reviewed an abbreviated advance copy of this book, from which the below examples of our claims are taken.

*Political indoctrination:* Advocation for a *one state non-Israeli solution* for the Middle East. ["One state solution" is a widely used expression by the Palestinians which means that the Jews must be driven into the Mediterranean Sea...that coexistence of Arabs and Jews is not an option.]

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\*Part of a multi-week effort to teach the public about the Middle East, sponsored by the Humanities Forum from October 13 until December 3. Specifically for teachers among this series of events are:

"Tools for Teachers", and  
"World in Transition Teachers' Workshop: The Middle East in Transition"

*Religious indoctrination:* The claim that the Koran is "the last link in a chain of revelation going back to time immemorial, even to the very origin of humankind"; an activity for students to give examples of their own personal and their government's "jihad" on page 39, which provides background for understanding and applying the concept of Jihad. (We don't think most Alaskan parents would like to have their children bring home a worksheet for them to fill out about what kind of "jihad" they are working on.)

*Historical revisionism:* Muslims reached the New World in pre-Columbian times and spread throughout the Caribbean, Central America, South America and even Canada. By the time Columbus arrived, the New World was fairly crawling with Muslims – and (unnamed) English explorers met "Iroquois and Algonquin chiefs with names like Abdul-Rahim and Abdallah Ibn Malik."

*Geographical misrepresentations:* Maps excluding the State of Israel, as though it does not exist.

*Anti-Semitism:* On page 378 of the Notebook, one reads "the enormous evil of the Holocaust warped the Jewish people".

It is incumbent upon the school district to determine the fairness and accuracy of any claims made in this book, prior to its dissemination.

The Notebook will surely be attractive to some teachers because it contains ready-made lesson plans, relieving them of a great deal of time spent and effort in composing their own lesson plans. To further induce teachers to use this book is the offer of a complete set of materials, including the aforementioned Notebook, valued at \$700, to the first 15 teachers who register for the session. We have to question *who is paying for this \$10,500 in classroom materials and why?*

In our view, employing this as a textbook for school children in the Anchorage School District would be doing a great disservice to everyone. It is unacceptable to suggest that teachers purchase this book or gain credit for attending these lectures without further work to provide balance.

ASD needs and deserves a better curriculum about the Middle East than this text presents, and we wish to play a role in creating a historically accurate, balanced curriculum. Critical to any such effort will be the removal of all non-factual statements. Unless all incorrect information is removed, this curriculum will be viewed by many fair-minded, knowledgeable members of our community as ASD-sanctioned offensive and divisive Arab propaganda.

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We support anyone seeking Peace, including Palestinians. To that end, we must be very careful not to perpetuate misunderstanding and hatred about the conflict in the Middle East. There must be no finger pointing. School curriculum should be open, fair and honest. The object, the End Game, is Peace.

We ask that the Anchorage School District immediately send out a disclaimer to all staff, decry the Notebook and freeze any use of this material in any schools pending review and thorough evaluation. We also request that you halt accreditation of the "Middle Eastern studies" for teachers and, if necessary, ensure that tuition is refunded to those who may have already paid.

Sincerely yours,

(See attached page)

cc: Lee Gorsuch, President  
University of Alaska at Anchorage

Paul Gitter

Steven W. Shore

Ki Soren Kjaersgaard, Ph.D.

Jessica Shemberg

Ellen Cole, Ph.D.

Peggy Gross

Alfred Agree

Grace Bortnick

Amy Lawrence

Alan

Sharon Lawrence

I. G. RABBI YOSEF GREENBERG

Jennifer Summers

Jane

Andy Gitterman

Alan E. Cruz  
A. Cruz

George

Kerry Brown

Rachael Jenner B.S., BSN, CPHN

The following people served on the ad hoc committee to review the Arab World Studies Notebook. All were voting members except for the co-chairs

Co-chairs: Steve Ex, Social Studies Coordinator  
Mardell Kiesel, Literacy Program Coordinator

Alex Bortnick - ASD teacher  
Irene Bortnick - ASD teacher  
Terry Jorgensen - ASD teacher  
Chip Nordhoff - ASD teacher  
Ruth Tweto - ASD principal  
Sue Eckels - ASD teacher  
Kelly Kirk - ASD teacher

Sharon Araji - UAA sociology professor  
Barbara Propes - AK World Affairs Council  
Janice Shamberg - Anchorage Assembly  
Bruce Shellenbaum - Anchorage Council of PTAs  
Glenn Cravez - private attorney  
Said Obeidi - business person

This memorandum was sent out via email on November 5, 2004 to: Jan Christensen, Steve Ex, Richie Goldstein, Mike Henry, Enid Hunter, Mardell Kiesel, Patricia McRae, Gail Opalinski, Ira Perman, and Level III (includes all principals, supervisors, directors).

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

MEMORANDUM

November 5, 2004

TO: ASD TEACHERS TAKING MIDDLE EAST 101: TOOLS FOR K-12  
TEACHERS – A WORKSHOP FOR EDUCATORS

FROM: CAROL COMEAU  
SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: USE OF CURRICULUM MATERIALS FROM THE ABOVE NAMED  
COURSE

Please be advised that ASD teachers may not use any materials from *The Arab World Studies Workbook* used in the above named course until the materials have been reviewed by a committee chaired by Social Studies Coordinator, Steve Ex, and representatives from the social studies curriculum committee, the Arab, Jewish, and others from the non-Arab community in Anchorage, and others knowledgeable about the middle east. After the committee review, the Executive Director for Curriculum and Assistant Superintendent for Instruction will review the materials and the committee's recommendations with me. Depending on the outcome of this discussion, I may be required to seek formal School Board approval for the use of any of these materials in our classrooms.

It is essential that our instructional materials, which are presented to Anchorage School District students, are balanced, accurate, and as up-to-date as possible. The School Board adopts our basic curriculum and any major deviation from the adopted curriculum requires course and content approval by the School Board. Further information on our requirements are found in School Board policy 341.

In addition, I will be asking the same committee to review the literature selections which may be included in the Literacy Curriculum Connection tubs for our schools to be sure that they are balanced and accurate. I will ask Literacy Coordinator, Mardell Kiesel, to participate in this process. Also to be reviewed is *The World in Transition* series.

If you have any questions about this information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

cc	Dr. Sharon Araji	Mardell Kiesel
	Jan Christensen	Patricia McRae
	Steve Ex	Gail Opalinski
	Richie Goldstein	Ira Perman
	Mike Henry	All Principals
	Enid Hunter	
	Mardell Kiesel	
	Patricia McRae	

Anchorage School District  
Controversial Issues Review Committee  
Summary of the minutes from the meeting on December 1, 2004

Compiled by Enid Hunter ED.D, facilitator  
The Controversial Issues Review Committee was called to order at approximately 6:45pm on December 1, 2004

Committee members present:

Philip Giorgione, Citizen-at-Large  
Jacqueline Hutchins, PTA  
Susan Haines, PTA  
Liz Carter, Citizen-at Large  
Linda Kumin, Elementary Librarian  
Mary Jo Iagulli, Middle School Librarian  
Glen Nielsen, Elementary Principal  
Martha Aarons, Citizen-at-Large  
Sabri Ghodsie, Secondary Teacher  
Mary Cook, Citizen-at-large  
Brooke Hull, Elementary Liaison  
Gina Pastos, Secondary Principal

Enid Hunter, Facilitator (non-voting)

Committee members absent:

Matthew Shuckerow, Student Advisory Board  
Atisa Logo, Minority Community  
Jason Armstrong, Citizen-at-Large  
Mary Rita Ely, Secondary Teacher

Also present: Alex Bortnick, Secondary Teacher. Mr. Bortnick had prepared a written resolution that opposed the use of the AWSN in ASD classrooms.

The meeting began with introductions and a summary of what transpired at the October 14<sup>th</sup> Controversial Issues Review Committee (CIRC) meeting. That meeting was convened because the CIRC did not meet in 2003-04. The committee met to introduce members, discuss procedures, roles and responsibilities.

Points covered were:

- A quorum of nine members must be present to act on an issue.
- The committee's role is advisory and is to review the complainant's issues and make recommendations for resolution to the superintendent. The superintendent will make recommendations to the school board, which will make the final decision.

- The options before the committee are open, ranging from recommending that no change be made to recommending that a book be totally removed from use, or anything in between.
- The complaint presently before the committee is atypical because the Arab World Studies Notebook (AWSN) is neither current ASD adopted nor approved supplemental material.
- At the October CIRC meeting, Social Studies coordinator Steve Ex provided the committee background information and a timeline of events.

Committee members subsequently received:

- A petition from community members which served as the “official” complaint form against AWSN
- Definitions of curriculum terms
- High school course of studies descriptions
- Alaska Geography, History, Government and Citizenship and Library Information Literacy content standards
- A resolution narrowly passed by the ad hoc committee that had previously reviewed the AWSN to disapprove its use in all Anchorage School District School classrooms. This resolution was authored by East High School teacher, Alex Bortnick.
- A copy of written statements by Kelly Kirk, Chugiak High School teacher that argued against the resolution (Ms. Kirk declined an invitation to appear at the meeting, stating her written summation would serve instead)

During the time the committee waited for Mr. Bortnick to appear, committee members, who had used the Internet to acquire more information, made important comments:

- In April 2004 the Algonquin nation forced distributors of the AWSN to remove inaccurate information.
- In September 2003 a California curriculum organization demanded that a statement of their support be removed from the AWSN.
- Glen Nielsen remarked on the AWSN’s lack of scholarship, quoting several pieces of historical misinformation pertinent to the 1948 War of Independence.

Mr. Bortnick arrived and took questions from the group. He shared his background that consisted of a degree in Middle East history, living in the Middle East for an extended period and making several trips to the Middle East. He is currently a social studies teacher at East High School. Mr. Bortnick also had opportunities to talk with the editor of the AWSN, Audrey Shabbas. She provided several key pieces of information, which he relayed to the committee and were integral to the committee’s decision:

- As editor of AWSN, Ms. Shabbas does not submit articles for peer review. This leads to great disparity in the quality of articles put into the notebook.
- Ms. Shabbas inserts articles when they are received, implying that approval of the current contents would not mean an approval of any additional articles that would later be added in regular updating.

Mr. Bortnick raised several other concerns including:

- The concern as to how accurately some of the articles present both sides of an issue.
- He reiterated concerns that statements in the AWSN are unsubstantiated as no research is cited.

- He volunteered that he uses materials like the Point Counterpoint series, which offers two articles, one for, and one against, debatable topics. He cited several other sources for materials.
- Examples were cited in AWSN of manipulation of the facts by omission or selectively choosing facts to lead to a specific result. Would it be possible or realistic for teachers to take time and effort on a regular basis and have the expertise required to ferret out those facts, which were negligently or intentionally misleading?
- The notebook has lesson plans. If a teacher is assigned to teach a course and doesn't know anything about it, the inclination would be to grab a book with lessons plans and use it despite the fact that one doesn't possess the scholarly knowledge or time to catch and substantiate inaccuracies.

Mr. Nielson made a motion to disallow the entire AWSN as supplemental material an ASD. Ms. Hutchins seconded the motion.

Ms. Pastos spoke to the issue of giving teachers newly hired an assignment to teach this elective course, that may well be out of their subject area. Ms. Hutchins talked about the notebook's lack of history regarding other countries in the Middle East and her impression was that the notebook seemed to be a collection of opinion pieces with no footnotes.

Ms. Hull wanted noted in the minutes a request by the committee to address the issue of having the social studies department do research to find a balance of good materials available for courses pertinent to this subject. Ms. Hull suggested compiling a list of reputable materials that are available.

The committee voted. The motion was carried unanimously, 12-0. There were no abstentions.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Enid Hunter, Ed.D.  
Facilitator, CIRC

**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES REVIEW COMMITTEE  
TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING  
DECEMBER 1, 2004**

Enid Hunter:

Thank you for taking on this undertaking, this important task. It requires a lot of reading and thought, just extra evening time and I really appreciate that. Ummm. I think we will introduce ourselves. It will make it easier for Wanda when she goes back and listens to the tape for the minutes. I passed out a parliamentary guide for dummies, I guess. I am not accustomed to running a meeting with this. I encourage anyone who can help with this, to jump in when you feel you need to.

We have to have a nine-member quorum of voting members which we have. We need a majority vote to make a recommendation. Just a reminder that we serve in an advisory capacity to the Superintendent who may choose to accept the recommendation or not. And carry whatever is appropriate forth to the Board and they will make their final decision. Just remember when we do make a recommendation to totally accept the materials and that they become freely available with no restrictions, or we can limit the availability of the materials in some way or it can go all the way over to the other side of the continuum and we can completely restrict the use of the materials in the classroom. To review the fact that this is not a normal case, these are not adopted materials, this is something supplemental that has risen to the floor and we are taking it to this process, because Carol felt that it needed to come through this venue.

What I did also.... put the, everybody got the resolution by Mr. Bortnick, some other materials that you requested, the content standards, the course description and so forth. And then Kelly Kirk's kind of rebuttal to the resolution that Alex Bortnick wrote. And I was able to get a hold of Mr. Bortnick today and he is going to come and actually go through his resolution, which kind of makes the process easier because we can question him then, or you can question him then, get clarification rather than going from ground zero like I thought we would do ordinarily. I do have his resolution on transparencies, in case we want to go back and look at it, because both of these were lengthy documents. I have Kelly Kirk's rebuttal, for lack of a better word, response. I also put the petition, which I sent everybody, with all the signatures, if anybody would like to see that up on the screen. Can everyone see that pretty good?

Ummmm, does anybody have any questions? I would really... I know this a rather formal process, but I am a person that is pretty cool with

questions and working things through as, so people really feel comfortable and at ease with the process.

Okay, why don't we just go, we are killing a little time here, so why don't we go with introductions, and start with Mrs. Hull.

- Brooke Hull: Brooke Hull, Rogers Park, Teacher
- Sabri Ghodsi: Sabri Ghodsi, West High Teacher
- GleneNielsen: Principal at Denali Elementary
- Linda Kumin: Librarian at Denali Elementary
- Phillip Giorgione: Citizen-at-Large, I have a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader at Trailside Elementary
- Mary Cook: Citizen-at-Large
- Jacqueline Hutchins: Mom .....PTA
- Mary Jo Iagulli: Librarian, Greuning Middle School
- Susan Haines: PTA, and counselor at West High
- Liz Carter: Citizen-at-Large. I have grandchildren in the system and I'm an ex-teacher of a thousand years ago.
- Enid Hunter: You also keep us level with your levity. (laughter)
- Liz Carter: I also promised my husband I would keep my mouth shut. (laughter)
- Martha Aarons: I had three daughters that went through West High School and I am a Citizen-at-Large.
- Wanda Walker: Wanda Walker, Curriculum.
- Enid Hunter: And she has graciously agreed to take the notes for this process. And I am Enid Hunter and the facilitator and I am a non-voting member and I want to make this process as good as I can for everybody, So, uh, I don't know, I feel we should wait for Mr.Bortnick....I know what we can do. If everybody can see the January calendar over there. I know it's far and in the future, but does anyone have an idea for a good meeting night because we do have this book that is part of the approved curriculum and we will be inviting the person to the next meeting who did have a complaint about it. Anybody have any ideas of what night in January would work for them?

Liz Carter: Do we get any idea what the complaint was about the book before next January?

Enid Hunter: Yes, I will email it; I will give it to you, in fact if I can find it I will give it to you tonight. Mardell Kiesel, Language Arts Coordinator might have it though. I am not sure.

Did anyone have any problem getting the materials besides Glenn?  
Everybody got what they needed.

Does Wednesday work for people?

Linda Kumin: I will be out of town the 12th through the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Enid Hunter: How about the 26<sup>th</sup> (January 26, 6:30 pm)? Does 6:30 work for everybody?

Martha Aarons: Excuse me. I didn't make the last meeting. I was under the impression that it was resolved and I guess it's not.

Enid Hunter: No, our first meeting was more or less to talk about procedures and so forth because it had been such a long time since the committee met. We didn't meet at all last year. So tonight is the night we will hear from Mr. Bortnick, kind a representing the complainant, and then follow-through with the process.

Brooke Hull: While we are waiting, did everyone have a chance to look at the content standards and kinda familiarize themselves? Because I think that's important.

Jacqueline Hutchins: I found some information on the Internet – I think it is good information, and not necessarily influencing the testimony.

Enid Hunter: Okay, a great time to share that.

Susan Haines: With regard to the Muslims in America, pre-Columbus and the objections to the historical inaccuracies, the Washington Times reported in April, 2004 that the Algonquin nation had forced the distributors of the guide to remove the inaccurate passage. They were not able to address how they would correct all the notebooks that had already been distributed around the country. But they did agree to remove that inaccuracy. The other inaccuracy was in California curriculum and frameworks and instructional resources. Their office has endorsed this

and approved it for use and that office in September of 2003 informed a textbook league that they had no record of approval covering the Arab World Studies Notebook and also demanded that the claim in question was false advertisement and they wanted that statement of support removed as well. A couple of things on the internet and the ...

Enid Hunter: Anyone else?

Glen Nielsen: As an adjunct to that. Some of the things we are jibbering. I believe I talked about this before. I am looking at the lack of scholarship is bad scholarship. I am looking at page 373, the question of Palestine. It talks about in the middle of the paragraph – *check book*. The Arab armed forces were numbered 3 to 1 and were....

That jumped out at me, that is not true. This is from the website on war.com. For example, in the 1948 War of Independence Israel was able to field about 140,000 individuals, men and women, Egypt, 300,000 – Jordan, 60,000, Palestine, 50,000 – Syria, 300,000. so you are looking at about a half million men in arms that are Arab, as opposed to 140,000 Israeli troops. One of the things I talked about last time is the various wars. This is a couple of wars that were very important. One that I thought spoke to the fact, a pretty strong bias, and this is anti-Israeli. These are empty spots, These are just numbers, you can't hide. Another one I found, I think Kelly Kirk's talks about he preeminent Arab author. Why is this person a preeminent Arab author? If you're preeminent in your field. I could not find anything. That jumped out.

Linda Kumin: There are some valuable and reliable materials available.

Enid Hunter: Okay, Alex Bortnick is here, I really sincerely thank him for coming on such short notice. As I said, I think this will make the process more informative in the way it ordinarily runs. Do you want to use the overhead?

Alex Bortnick: No, I'm changing gears from Hmong Cultural Training a few hours ago. (laughter) Were there questions? I presume people have had a chance to read it...

Enid Hunter: Everyone has had a chance to read it and .....

Alex Bortnick: Perhaps I can answer questions and save some time. Yeah , sure.

Jacqueline Hutchins: I'd just like to know your background.

A. Bortnick: Certainly, it's a history degree originally, at the University of Maryland in the 60's which was Middle East history. I did live in Israel for 5 years and traveled in Turkey a good bit. And I suppose, I should say, I was a social worker in a terrorist prison, or security offender prison, but I was in charge of working with the prisoners' families and getting social welfare and promoted to the Head of the Classification Center for the prison system. I left to become a lawyer, a district attorney, and eventually ended up in Alaska, also a DA and school teacher.

Brooke Hull: What year were you in Israel?

AB: 1966, 1967-1968 in the Six-Day War, 1969-1971, in the War of Attrition, 1973-74, Yom Kipper War and 1975-76 in the prison services.

Hull: So, about 30 years ago.

AB: Yes, I've been back about six times.

Hutchins: And you are currently a ....

AB: Social Studies teacher at East High School  
Any others?

Susan Haines: Mr. Bortnick is there anything in this notebook that is salvageable, from your standpoint with regard to valid materials rather than be an all or nothing deal?

A. Bortnick: Absolutely, perhaps I can elaborate for a moment. I had the opportunity to talk with the editor, Ms. Shabazz and I inquired about a number of things that struck me as rather odd, historically inaccurate as I perceive it. She indicated that she was not the author, even though her name appears on a number of articles as co-author, she is an editor, She informed me as I recall she produces this in her garage, which is fine. But, unlike other publishers, she does not submit it to peer review. She solicits articles and receives them and puts them in a book. Which means there is a great disparity in the quality, some are excellent, some are rather problematical. So our committee looked at the questions, first of all, to identify some of the problem areas to get a sense of the quantity and the degree of problem and that was there. Second, consider what would the appropriate response to those kinds of things, would cautionary notes suffice, would excising materials suffice, would a combination suffice? In the end more of us felt that the objectionable materials so permeated the book, that as a book itself it was highly objectionable. However to be fair, there are large number of articles that struck me actually as quite good, mostly art, music in those areas. By

the way, as I recall, Ms. Shabazz is a retired California seventh grade art teacher. So her field is art and the arts. Not just, not any particular kinds of art. Those materials to my simple reading were quite good and actually useful. It was historical material, political material, content area things that we found problems, not every article, but a large number, but also the, uhh, some of the language used, I will give you a specific example or two. There were phrases it is understood that “es” as a suffix denotes the *sign* from a Muslim family, which means Fernando Cortes or Benito Juarez would be... I wrote to eleven Internet sites in Spanish and English, in Spain and the US inquiring about that. What I found universally was that “es” denotes “son of”. No one ever said, I inquired of Spanish professors. It takes a great deal of work to disapprove a statement that has no support, There are number of statements like that throughout, where there are bold assertions. I believe, getting fragments from my memory, page 66 was indicating things like “based on new research evidence. Muslims were navigating the Mississippi a century before Columbus”. No new research is specified, just a little gem in there and these things appear periodically. A number of us felt they don’t comply with the state mandated standards for teaching content areas. Religion also was objectionable, more so than others. Not the teaching of it or about it, but the way it was done. It seemed to promote an agenda. We did not get to current events of the Middle East. We did not get there. That would have been, perhaps a more heated debate. But, but it’s not an issue of one side or the other, it’s an issue of presenting two sides if we are dealing with school children. We thought materials like the Point Counterpoint Series, if you are familiar with it, which offer two articles, one for and one against, on any topic is the appropriate kind of thing. Or having two different kinds of materials, it was not presenting a specific point of view, it was the quality of this, we felt it was academically sensible. To much of it, but, yes, to answer your question a good number of articles, primarily in the arts, literature, or music are due credit and are quite good.

E. Hunter:

Thank you.

B. Hull:

So, did the group come up with certain pages? This is positive and useful and we can use these pages and not these pages? Was there any attempt to delineate?

A. Bortnick:

Yes, and we discussed it. We decided, and in the end it is probably better not to have this particular book. It is not a banning of a book from society. It is not appropriate for use in the schools, because it is regularly updated. She is regularly getting these articles. It is a three-ring binder. What quality control do you have? Yes, it is true we rely on teachers to know this, but some of the teachers were rather passionate about keeping the book – I think, for using certain art materials, is my own

recollection, perhaps erroneously. The point is if this is floating around and you started using it, you're assigned to teach a course and the reality is you're teaching Middle East Studies, and you don't know anything about it - you grab a book off a shelf, lesson plans are there...it's great, and you don't always catch all these little things. Those teachers who are history teachers, and they are very good history teachers thought they read it. We went through it and pointed out these things, that's ridiculous and that's absurd. Even the good teachers that read the book didn't even know about it or see it.

B. Hull: You say you are a history teacher now, – what view of the Arab world do you have books to refer to so that you can present a balanced view to your children?

A. Bortnick: My particular courses right now are dealing with ninth grade Honors, which is a integrated history, actually it is a world history. Umm, and I start from the textbooks and the AP books and I use, personally, a number of online college materials. I'll give you an example of duplicate materials for most of her stuff. There are materials from Fordham University on the web, free, [www.internethistorysourcebook.com](http://www.internethistorysourcebook.com). Has about eight collections, one is Islamic. And it is primarily a collection of primary source documents, it's got art, music, original works, some of the greatest Islamic scientists and artists, poets, anything you want you can find there. There is a tremendous amount of good material and it's all available – you can take and use.

B. Hull: Is that course materials you gathered or is that interdepartmental where it's been given out to....

A. Bortnick: It's on the web. Is it geared to university level coursework. But you can .... of the art. The idea is to expose the students to the golden age. if you will. That is one of the issues we looked at in the Middle East Studies in the syllabus that the district had. It started with 1917 - the first one... could not understand the Middle East if you start with 1917, but more importantly it completely avoids all of the great contributions of the Middle East. All of the great contributions of art...science. We had some issues with that also. But that is a different topic also. I hope I answered your question.

Susan Haines: I'd like to go back to, just to clarify. You said that once everyone possesses the notebook and has gone through the training – do they subscribe to get the updates or do they have to pursue them somewhere or automatically sent to them?

A. Bortnick: My understanding is you get on a mailing list if take these programs and they will notify you.

Unknown: Okay, cause that element is that. It really troubles me that we are just looking at this as a one time issue, but it will keep coming up again and again.

A. Bortnick: There is a control issue over a 3-ring binder - actually address the issue, and can we approve certain sections and not approve and put out a directive? But every year you would have to alter the pages and they are constantly... this.

Unknown: Does one have to, if one went with the architecture, that realm of this... Does one have to update the information or can one take those portions, and say these are valuable and useful, we feel they are competent in skills and we can use those?

A. Bortnick: I think you can. I think that is a possibility.

To approve those sections does not mean you're approving any supplementary materials that are later added.

It is certainly a doable thing. Consensus. It is probably better that we not take this one, but to put in a call for a more.....on this area of the world, from the Middle East. I checked my own school library, and there is not enough. We certainly feel much more is needed and balanced and all kinds of opinions. The issue we had was not specifically presenting opinions, but what we felt was a indefensible opinion or material omission of fact, or selectively choosing facts to lead to a specific result without giving two sides of what the students debate. That was the nature of...

That may be the realm of what a teacher does, to make sure that there is a presentation of both sides. If I took this book, I would want to make sure I have another book to balance.

The issue was, what troubled us about that was if the teachers had the expertise to recognize the manipulation of facts. It takes a great bit of information to document that these facts are either negligently or intentionally misleading, because things have been omitted, or been changed. It takes a great bit of work to get to that. I haven't looked at the Middle East studies since the 60's. I have many other degrees since then, but not Middle East. Certainly things have changed dramatically, but I recognize just from back then – I remember different professors, some were German, some were New York Jewish professors, some were Palestinian professors, a whole variety of perspectives. But all of them

held to an interpretation of the facts but not a manipulation of the facts. That was the key thing that many of us noted. There is a difference in interpreting factual material and arguing it – that is fine. Or creating, or maneuvering the facts to come to a certain solution. But to give credit to; there were some good parts. I think the problem is the nature of how she puts the book together. She solicits articles and puts them in a binder. There is no review, that's it. That was it in a nutshell.

Mary Jo Iagulli: There is a charge for this. Who backs this with dollars? There is no charge for this, who is paying for this?

A. Bortnick: Someone is paying for this.

J. Hutchins: I have done some research online, I left in the car. I'll go down and get it if you like. There are various different organizations that I went through. As I went through their budgets, one of them had \$10,000 to support the Arab World Studies Notebook. They were not AWAIC, they were not the Middle East Policy Committee, they were yet another Middle Eastern group, and in their budget was money to support the notebook.

Unknown: I have the Middle East Policy Council.

J. Hutchins: Right, that's one of them

A. Bortnick: There are lot of places...this is the subject of some congressional inquiry, We had the notes that we looked at, not limited to this one notebook. It was an issue of secondary supplemental materials coming into the school – they don't go through the regular review. My understanding is how it works in Anchorage, please correct me if I am wrong. A teacher gets the materials and says they like it. Maybe sends a copy requesting use, a couple of testimonials. Probably slides right in. It usually goes right under the radar. There were a number of examples on this type of material, not all on the Middle East. There were two or maybe three on the Middle East, some very good. There were many examples of many things.

E. Hunter: Any other questions? Liz Carter?

L. Carter: Are the signatures on the back from the committee?

A. Bortnick: I haven't seen the signatures.

E. Hunter: This was a petition that was originated when it was found that this book was linked to a course that was going to be in part funded by the ASD Social Studies department as it was in conjunction with this MESA workshop, 2003, in the fall.

A. Bortnick: It was called the ..... school district and the Humanities Forum and this book just happened to be one small, tiny, tiny part of that whole thing.

E. Hunter: She was coming up I believe, if I am correct. Ms. Shabazz was a presenter on some type of art, tent art or something. She was doing a workshop and this notebook was offered as an adjunct to that class.

A. Bortnick: Well, I took the workshop. The workshop was in art. It was perfectly fun. It was painting. It was fun, no problem at all. It did not involve the work of the book, the book was promoted. There was no workshop on the book, it was just look at this wonderful opportunity. You can have this free, just use it. And that was offered periodically. She did not do a workshop on the notebook. Her workshop was fine, and she was invited back. Excuse me; I'm losing my voice. There was a teacher academy that I attended in the summer, I did not take the course, and some of my friends took the course. It was teaching teachers, primarily middle school students, but the notebook was promoted.

B. Hull: Is there anything else that we should know that would be helpful for us in our decision making?

A. Bortnick: We wrestled with this for quite awhile. Some of us actually read this thing quite a bit, did research on it. I'm not sure what they did. For the majority of those who attended, although there was a heated debate going on at the end. I wish you had two or three of the explanations, there was a response that I don't have that, perhaps Steve does. It was between Mr. Shellenbaum and Ms. Kirk; they were exchanging viewpoints, professionally, but with some emotion. It kind of crystallized the work of the committee. The issue we looked at was simply whether this was an appropriate tool for teaching students in the school, that's all. Is it an appropriate thing? Although parts are, and parts are arguably not very much so. Given the difficulty in insuring that only the non-objectionable parts are going to be used, would it be an appropriate thing to use or so many other materials that are not objectionable that they can use. And that was our conclusion in the end. It is constantly being revised. Much of it may be improved, much of it may be wonderful, but it will be anticipating the objectionable part. But then we look at whether this would deny students. We thought there was so much more available material that is not objectionable for little or no cost. So why get involved? That was it and how we ended it and we voted. A small majority decided it is not appropriate as a teaching tool.

M. Cook: Do you still personally feel the same as the committee?

A. Bortnick: I think I wrote it a little more strident. It was a late night. I want to make sure. Ms. Shabazz is to my understanding honestly believes in this, a labor of love. She truly believes this a good thing. She has done a lot of good things. I have a disagreement with parts of her product, that's all. I believe, overall, if you were to excise and select parts of non-objectionable materials, because it is beneficial to students, no one would be hurt and some may enjoy it. The problem we looked at was could you do that realistically with a book that is constantly being revised? Are you getting into more and more over and over again? This kinds of thing comes. Is there control to insure that ...I don't know if you've had a chance to review some of the historical claims and political claims? We didn't get into the political claims in terms of the debate, because we decided long before, that this was not something...and some people felt upset by portions of this. The religious aspect offended a couple of people. Some were quite offended and pretty angry. You can't discuss the Middle East without someone getting angry. It does touch that cord in some.

***Question.....could not hear...***

A. Bortnick: One of the tests we looked at in one meeting, let's substitute Catholicism, for Islam. Can we teach this, or any other religion? We felt we would be in hot water with any religion, other than Islamic, because of the way it was being presented. There is no question about teaching, but the particular methodology seemed to us highly objectionable.

E. Hunter: Any other questions?

L. Carter: Who was the committee? Was it the department heads?

A. Bortnick: No, no - the Superintendent appointed a number of people community wide. There were Palestinians, Jewish, there were people unaffiliated, and there were teachers, educators, not connected to the school district.

L. Carter: How many numbers?

A. Bortnick: To my recollection, we had about 8 or 9. We didn't have that many Meetings. We had 2 Native Alaskans, 2 attorneys, Janice Schaumberg, Assembly, 1 teacher from Chugiak, Ms. Kirk, Palestinian businessman, and Steve Ex.

Unknown: But it wasn't a large group.

A. Bortnick: It was not a large group, but what was unfortunate it was a rather small group who showed up and participated. People that voted – 2, one being Sharon Araji. Most just did not come.

- E. Hunter: Any other questions?
- G. Nielsen: I make a motion to not accept the entire Arab World Studies as supplemental material in the Anchorage School District.
- B. Hull: I don't have problems with portions of it. Quite frankly, according to Fordham University it is great. If we have lack of information that teachers can refer to, not necessarily use as lessons, but as a reference, I will err on the side of having to ...I think there is some very good stuff. Anything political, anything, obviously where it ends. There are some things in here that may not be as factual. There are some things that are not as factual.
- G. Pastos: I'd like to speak to the control issue. I am a past high school principal and I can tell you from the stand point of control. I wanted to ask Alex, when a Social Studies teacher is hired, it is like this, you hope you got that person, it is desperation half the time, and then when they are hired you'll have the department chair call them, you give them the standards book and say this is what you are teaching, because this is what the kids requested and this is what we have the numbers for. Often times, they aren't teaching in their own subject areas, they mastered in or have a passion for, or their own college training. Control comes in where it is an issue in a high school for me where you have a staff of about 200 people where your control issues are just making sure basic management standards are followed through. Getting to the curriculum with your teachers is the dream of a lifetime; the reality is it is not there. You really rely on your department chair. You hope you have the best department chair in the building. I can really see exactly what Alex said is happening. You give them part of this. You don't have time to explain the whole background; you are only getting part of this, blah, blah. Hugely supportive of teacher freedom and teacher professionalism, but in the real world a lot of our Social Studies teachers are brand spanking new. They're coming right out of the gate, and often times they are very passionate about their own beliefs and I can just see in my mind, it is either all or nothing, because of the control issue. Seeing that this is going to be primarily for high school use. This is why I support Glenn's motion, because I know the reality. The dream would be yeah, let's give them those cool ...I'd rather see them go to some of the Internet sites that he is working with. I've seen his kids using the computer to do those things. There are some exciting things that he does with his kids. So, that's why I am supporting Glenn. It is the control issue, it's also the scholarship modeling, and it's also the lack of alignment to standards, those things are huge to me, that's why I support not adopting this at all.
- G. Nielson: There are a couple of supplemental materials – you know if it is from Fordham or Cairo University. A concern is to glean the nuggets; there

isn't the time to do this. There are so many little things that are not there completely. There is so much. I don't see this as bad and we are keeping it from others. I'm saying there are better sources out there, there are better materials.

P. Giorgione: This may be piece meal, but I still think it is better than adopting something because there isn't anything else out there. I think that is more dangerous than anything.

E. Hunter: Jacqueline.

J. Hutchins: When I was going through this, one of the things that bothered me was the lack of history that was in it. History suddenly blossomed in the Arab world when Mohammed was born, so what happened before he was born? What happened in 35 BC, 1500 BC, 200 AD? Because a lot happened in that part of the world, but all of that was ignored I expected explanations on how those countries were formed. What is now Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan and some other country. Now there are 5 or more different countries. There is no discussion, or biography of the political leaders that exist or have existed. There is no history. There is just a few selected pieces. It says Arab World Studies Notebook. I expected to learn about the Arab world and I didn't, and that frustrated me. The terms Arab, Middle East and Muslim was used so interchangeably back and forth, it's like they were the same thing. Not all people who are in the Middle East are Arab. There were no footnotes – seemingly a condescending attitude, submitted religious terms, took offense to, not enough comprehensive information. As I read, I asked myself...no footnotes. The condescending attitude. What the word Islam means, and she talked about it's meaning, is submit. The way she started out, here we go, the way she started out, obviously there is a negative connotation of Western culture with this word, we'll go about explaining this way. A series of opinion pieces. It's like taking a book that's full off articles, by George Will, Charles W..... Molly Ivans, and calling it American Literature. It's a part of history, but it's not factual history. You have to do research. The final thing is, I spent 24 hours reading. Many of the cultural or historical.... It lacked so much. I wanted to know something.

Susan Haines: There were no source documents – this book came to the committee and I believe it is not the intention of the committee to ban a book. However, there were no footnotes to support the information that was in the book.

E. Hunter: I need to make a clarification – we are not adopting this material, what we are trying to decide is whether an ASD teacher can use this binder as a teaching tool.

Iagulli: If we were to agree with the notebook we would have to remove certain portions of the notebook. If we leave it as it stands every teacher will assume it is ok to use. I read the material and had to gather information and better understanding. There were no sources, but opinions, opposing view points. I would like to.....

B. Hull: not have the book

Iagulli: There are no updates and there are portions of the book to accept.

E. Carter: How many teachers have the book?

E. Hunter: There are about 8 copies. Carol had mentioned not to use the binder until it was reviewed by the Controversial Issue Review Committee.

G. Pastos: I make a motion to axe the Arab World Studies binder

J. Hutchins: Second.

***FROM THIS POINT ON OF THE TAPE, THE UNDERSTANDING AND THE ABILITY TO HEAR WHAT WAS BEING SAID WAS DIFFICULT.***

E. Hunter: How many in favor?

B Hull: I am in support of the history department doing some research.

E. Hunter: Steve Ex brought another binder from a conference in Washington, DC

B. Hull: We need to address the issue of having a balance within the ASD.

L. Kumin: Second the motion

E. Hunter: It would be good if we could compile a list of reputable materials that are available.

G. Nielsen: There are notable works by Bernard Lewis, Princeton – Arab Studies

L. Kumin:

S. Ghodsi:

P. Giorgione:

E. Hunter:

P. Giorgione:

A motion was made to adjourn at 7:50 pm. The next meeting will be Wednesday, January 26, 6:30 pm.