Public school board under fire for "Free Palestine" remark in new dress code

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BlackburnNews.com File Photo of the Thames Valley District School Board office.

By Rebecca Chouinard November 18, 2022 7:15am

The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) is facing backlash from London's Palestinian community for suggesting the slogan "Free Palestine" could be used to promote or incite violence.

The school board recently published its new Guidelines for Student Dress to its website. In the FAQ section, TVDSB used a "Free Palestine" t-shirt as an example of a "divisive political slogan" that could potentially lead to violence.

Thomas Woodley, the president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, and Nehal AL Tarhuni, the president of The Canadian Palestinian Social Association in London, have expressed their concerns over this anti-Palestenian discourse. AL Tarhuni was particularly concerned about how this message would impact students of a Palestenian background.

Both Woodley and AL Tarhuni have called for TVDSB to consider the cultural sensitivity around the "Free Palestine" movement, and to better educate staff and students on what this slogan really means.

The FAQ section, which contained the controversial remark, has now been removed from the Guidelines for Student Dress. Mark Fisher, the director of education for TVDSB, issued a statement acknowledging the school board's mistake and apologizing for the harm caused to the community.

"Thames Valley District School Board leadership is actively meeting with both the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and Hikm Public Affairs Council to discuss the next steps in taking responsibility and repairing harm," the statement said.

Members of the Palestenian community are demanding further action be taken. Many have taken to social media to condemn the school board for publishing the offensive comment.

TVDSB has yet to follow-up on its initial statement.