

Youth Commission Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 9th, 2026 at 6:30pm
Frances Albrier Community Center
2800 Park St. Berkeley, CA 94703

The Commission may discuss any items listed on the agenda, but may take action only on items identified as Action.

1. Call to Order (Chair): 6:33pm
2. Roll Call (Secretary): Present: Marshall-Lappe, Lutzker, Rohn, Meleis, Marchesini, Hughes, Geoghegan, Hightower-Gaskin and Lewis-Pichler. Absent: Weisberg, Fong, Patel and Astera.
3. Approval of Agenda (Chair): M/S: Hughes/Marshall-Lappe. Aye's: Lutzker, Rohn, Meleis, Marchesini, Geoghegan, Hightower-Gaskin and Lewis-Pichler. Noe's: None. Abstain: Weisberg, Fong, Patel and Astera.
4. Approval of Minutes for Feb 9th, 2026 (Chair): M/S: Hughes/Geoghegan. Aye's: Lutzker, Rohn and Marchesini. Noe's: None. Abstain: Weisberg, Fong, Hightower-Gaskin, Lewis-Pichler, Meleis, Patel and Astera.
5. Public Comments (2 min):
6. Chair's Announcements (Chair)
7. Director's Report
8. Discussion: Letter Approval and Next Actions
9. Action: Letter Approval. M/S: Hughes/Geoghegan. Aye's: Lutzker, Rohn, Meleis, Marchesini, Marshall-Lappe, Hightower-Gaskin and Lewis-Pichler. Noe's: None. Abstain: Weisberg, Fong, Patel and Astera.
10. Action: Potential Creation of School Board Public Comment Sub Committee. M/S: Hughes/Marshall-Lappe. Aye's: Lutzker, Rohn, Meleis, Marchesini, Geoghegan, Hightower-Gaskin and Lewis-Pichler. Noe's: None. Abstain: Weisberg, Fong, Patel and Astera.
11. Review of Brown Act Info
12. Adjourn: 7pm. M/S: Hughes/Geoghegan. Aye's: Lutzker, Rohn, Meleis, Marchesini, Marshall-Lappe, Hightower-Gaskin and Lewis-Pichler. Noe's: None. Abstain: Weisberg, Fong, Patel and Astera.

Commission Information: The Youth Commission packet is available for review at both the Berkeley Main Library and the Park Recreation & Waterfront Department Office at 2180 Milvia Street –3rd Floor, during normal business hours. If you have questions, contact Commission Secretary, Ginsi K. Bryant, at 981-6678 or by email at gbryant@berkeleyca.gov or Co Secretary, Jasmine Gunn-Vaca, at 981-6671 or by email at jgunnvaca@berkeleyca.gov

ADA Disclaimer: This meeting is being held in a wheelchair accessible location. To request disability- related accommodations to participate in the meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, please contact the Disability Services Specialist at 981-6342 (V) or 981-6345 (TDD) at least three business days before the meeting date. Please refrain from wearing scented products to this meeting.

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Youth Commission Members

District	Name	District	Name
Mayor	Hannah Slattery Weisberg	BUSD/Brown	Vacant
Kesarwani	Monique Hightower-Gaskin	BUSD/Shanoski	Nuri Lewis-Pichler
Taplin	Reece Fong	BUSD/Babbitt	Karim Meleis
Bartlett	Diya Patel	BUSD/ Chang	Neela Marchesini
Tregub	Vacant	BUSD	Kiara Huges
Hahn	Ida Marshall-Lappe	BUSD	Neshia Geoghegan
Wengraf	Maia Astera	BUSD	Vacant
Lunaparra	Thea Lutzker	BUSD	Vacant
Humbert	Yoshi Robn	BUSD	Vacant

Mission Statement

The Berkeley Youth Commission identifies the needs of youth, reviews and recommends youth services and recreation programs.

03/04/26

Dear Members of the School Board,

On behalf of the Berkeley Youth Commission, we write to urge the district to address significant gaps and concerns identified by students regarding the teaching of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Berkeley schools.

From December 8th to January 12th, the Youth Commission conducted a survey that received 163 responses from students across Berkeley Unified School District ("BUSD"). Respondents represented a wide range of grade levels, with the largest groups consisting of 11th grade students (66 responses) and 8th grade students (37 responses), demonstrating that these concerns span both middle and high school populations.

When asked how much they have learned about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in school, 70% of students reported low exposure, selecting a 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale (114 students total). In contrast, students reported learning significantly more about the conflict through social media, with over 61% selecting a 4 or 5 on the same scale (100 students). This disparity is concerning, as it suggests that many students are forming their understanding of a complex and sensitive conflict primarily through unregulated and potentially misleading online sources rather than structured, educational settings.

An overwhelming majority of students, 92.6% (151 respondents) expressed a desire to learn more about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in school, specifically in ethnic studies or history classes. Students repeatedly emphasized that schools should be a place for factual, contextualized learning that reduces misinformation rather than allowing social media to fill the gap.

At the same time, student responses clearly show that how this topic is taught matters deeply. Concerns raised by students who were hesitant or opposed to learning more in school included fears of bias, unproductive or hostile classroom discussions, emotional distress, and the difficulty of teaching an ongoing conflict. Some students expressed concern about antisemitism, while others emphasized the need for Palestinian voices to be included without being dismissed or labeled as anti-semitic. These responses highlight the polarization students are already experiencing and the urgent need for careful, balanced, and respectful instruction on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

When asked what would make them feel comfortable learning about this topic, students consistently called for neutrality, factual accuracy, and clear boundaries. Common themes included:

- Clear distinctions between governments, armed groups, and civilians;
- Assurance that Palestinian, Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, Arab, and other students would not be targeted or blamed;
- Structured discussions grounded in historical facts before debate;
- A safe, judgment-free environment with clear guidelines for dialogue; and
- Provide teachers with adequate support and protection when teaching the material.

Students repeatedly expressed that they want schools to be places where difficult topics can be discussed thoughtfully, without fear, harassment, or oversimplification. Many emphasized that avoiding the topic altogether only increases misinformation, polarization, and harm.

In light of this data, we urge the School Board to prioritize education on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in our schools.

We hope to continue this conversation and that student voices will be heard in the implementation process. Students are asking for this education. Education that is accurate, and taught by our trained educators. Addressing this need is essential to fostering critical thinking, empathy, and respectful discourse within our school community. We have many ideas for how this may be approached and want to continue to serve as the voice of Berkeley students to ensure action is taken.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very sincerely,
The Berkeley Youth Commission