

From: Lara Kiswani

Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 12:03 AM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>;

Cc: AROC [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] IQC Public Comment - Arab American Lesson Plan & Guiding Principles of ES

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

I have been a resident of California my entire life, a product of the public school system, and a daughter of Palestinian Muslim immigrants. In addition to serving as a faculty member in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, I have the honor of being the executive director of one the few Arab-led agencies serving Arab and Muslim families in the Northern California, the Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC).

I am writing to express my disappointment in the revisions to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC).

AROC's youth program published a 2020 report, TURATH (Teaching Understanding and Representing Arabs Throughout History), on the representation of Arabs in Bay Area high schools. The findings included that only 2.3% of students surveyed learned about Arabs and/or Muslims at school.

For these reasons, and countless others, the Arab and Muslim community was heartened by the original draft of the ESMC, where expert scholars included a robust Arab American Studies unit as an extension of Asian American Studies, and as an essential component of Ethnic Studies. We were heartened because it is more important now than ever, to protect youth of color. Since then, we have witnessed the erasure of Arab American Studies, and our entire experience and history relegated to a footnote in the curriculum, reinforcing a centuries-old trope written and studied about extensively thanks to the foundational work of the late Palestinian American scholar, Edward Said.

Furthermore, the current Arab American lesson plan is insufficient and lacks fidelity to the discipline of Ethnic Studies. The lesson in the current version of the curriculum limits a view of Arab American experience to stereotypes. In addition to triggering Arab American youth, this lesson does nothing to expose the historic racialization of Arab American communities, the oppressive institutional policies and practices that have kept Arab Americans at the margins, or our hundreds of years of struggle for justice. There is no mention of Arab migration to the US, or US policies that have led to forced migration. All mention of Palestine and Palestinians has been erased. Ethnic studies scholars agree that it's impossible to understand Arab American issues without understanding the struggle of Palestinians.

And we have yet to receive any explanation as to why the Arab American lesson plan was placed in the appendix instead of in its rightful place in Asian American Studies. Why would the California Department of Education

decide to go against the grain and remove us from the rubric of Asian American studies? As the Association for Asian American Studies stated, "Arab American studies has been part of the broader field of Asian American studies for nearly two decades and ethnic studies since its inception 50 years ago." Following a decades-long experience in higher education, leaders in the API community, veterans of the 1968 student strike that created ethnic studies, and original writers of the curriculum tirelessly advocated for the centrality of the experience of Palestinians and Arab Americans to Ethnic Studies.

Ethnic studies is not an 'all lives matter' discipline. These revisions are tone-deaf and potentially dangerous to the political moment we are living in. Ethnic studies is not about balance, inclusion and multiple perspectives. Ethnic Studies is about centering the experience and struggles of racialized and indigenous communities.

I urge you to please consider the following:

1. The Arab American lesson plan be re-inserted into its rightful place, within the rubric of Asian American Studies.
2. The Arab American lesson plan that was solicited by CDE and submitted to CDE in August, and subsequently submitted as a public comment on November 12th, be considered for the next draft of the ESMC.
3. Work with ethnic studies practitioners to align the entire ESMC with the guiding values and principles of Ethnic Studies.

Thank you for your work and attention to this matter,

Lara Kiswani
Executive Director
[Arab Resource & Organizing Center \(AROC\)](#)