

July 21, 2020

California State Board of Education

California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear President Dr. Darling Hammond and State Board of Education Members,

The undersigned members of the Armenian American School Board Association strongly urge the CDE to hear the voices of Armenian American Californians and reflect our histories and experiences in California public education.

We write to you today firmly in support of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, the calls of Asian American scholars to include West Asian American Studies, and the inclusion of Armenian-Americans within that curriculum.

Armenians have had a long history of immigration to the United States and experiences of racialization and marginalization, similar to many other immigrant communities and ethnic and linguistic minorities. From the early immigration of Armenians to the Central Valley as refugees of the genocide of the Ottoman Empire, to the emigration of Armenians from the former Soviet Union, the Republic of Armenia, Iran and war-torn countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, Armenians make up a significant ethnic group in California. In fact, Scholars estimate that Armenian-Americans represent up to 500,000 people in California, with the greatest population of Armenians outside of Armenia residing in California.

For this reason, it is imperative that Armenian American students see themselves as part of the larger California community and see their experiences reflected in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The Armenian-American experience in the United States has grappled with issues of refugeehood, erasure, immigration, and marginalization. Many Armenian American students are immigrants, children of immigrants and English Language Learners. They have been subjected to discriminatory practices and what Dr. Angela Valenzuela calls “subtractive schooling”- assimilation through deculturalization. Most of us Armenian American school board members have had these same experiences when we ourselves were students in California public schools.

As educators and school board members, we understand the importance of having students see themselves, their histories and identities reflected and affirmed in the curriculum. Also, we believe that it is important for all students to learn about the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups to build tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding. We strongly support the Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum but we insist that the Armenian American experience be included in a meaningful way within the West Asian American Studies category.

We would be glad to provide you with the names and contact information of scholars who are working in this field and who would be willing to help write the Armenian American portion of the Model Curriculum.

Don't cut us out. We urge you to hear community voices calling for the inclusion of West Asian American experiences within Ethnic Studies, and the necessity of Armenian-American histories within that experience.

We thank you in advance for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Dr. Suzie Abajian
School Board Member
South Pasadena Unified School District

Dr. Armond Aghakhanian
School Board President
Burbank Unified School District

Dr. Armina Gharpetian
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