

To: State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, President Linda Darling-Hammond and members of the State Board of Education, and members and staff of the Instruction Quality Commission at the California Department of Education:

I write this letter in response to the current Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) and to express grave concerns regarding the lack of Pacific Islander and Arab American Studies representation in the latest draft of the ESMC.

I grew up and was educated from kindergarten through high school in Sacramento and Elk Grove public schools. I never saw or heard my people's histories in the entire time I was in school; in fact, the first time I ever read something by a Pacific Islander, for Pacific Islanders, was in my final year as an undergraduate student. I was introduced to the work of Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa by visiting Tongan scholar, Dr. Fuifuilupe Niumeitolu, who came to speak on my campus during my senior year as an undergrad. I cannot stress enough how life-changing it was to read and discuss the work of a Pacific Islander scholar with another Islander.

This representation of my peoples' histories and ways of knowing radically changed my relationship to knowledge and education. It put me on my path toward getting my Masters in Pacific Islands Studies and my PhD focusing on Pacific Islander literature. I now hold a PhD, and beginning this August, I will be teaching as an Assistant Professor of Critical Pacific Islands Studies at San Francisco State University. I can honestly say that without the community, representation, study, and pedagogy from Pacific Islanders on our knowledges and histories, I would not be who I am today.

But this knowledge and representation of Pacific Islanders, by Pacific Islanders, was only available and accessible to me in university settings, which I was extremely privileged to be part of. Pacific Islander histories—and more importantly, the empowerment and self-actualization that comes from knowing these histories—should be readily available and effectively taught to our younger generations in K-12 curriculum. It is vital for us as Pacific Islanders to see, experience, and understand the importance of our knowledge and histories in our schooling. It is also crucial for us to learn and discuss how we have things to contribute from our communities and intergenerational connections that are not exclusively important for us, but are also critical for all our communities with whom we learn.

Pacific Islander histories and knowledges also teach us critical skills of community and solidarity-building. In the fight to include Pacific Islands Studies in this curriculum, I cannot advocate for my people's representation without also standing in solidarity with Arab American teachers, organizers, students, and community to demand that Arab American Studies be included in this curriculum. Without histories of Arab American politics, cultural practices, and genealogies of resistance, we would not have Pacific Islands Studies as it is today. Without them, we do not have an Ethnic Studies curriculum that serves to speak back to power, revitalize our communities, and provide visions of just and sovereign futures. We owe our students an education that draws from Arab American and Pacific Islander knowledges.

In remembrance of the teachers who taught me that my peoples' histories, experiences, memory, and resistance to erasure are sacred and worthy of study, who have been fighting for our voices to be heard, I urge the CDE Curriculum Team and Instructional Quality Commission to pass an ESMC that includes Pacific Islander and Arab American studies course outlines moving forward and that the commission work with the respective communities to ensure our course outlines are included. I also demand that the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) committee of writers and experts be reconvened. This committee of Ethnic Studies scholars and teachers are the experts on Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, and are the decision-makers I trust to guide this curriculum forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Please do not hesitate to contact me at lkava@sfsu.edu to provide further information.

Sincerely,

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