

From: Arya Marvazy
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 1:41 PM
To: Ethnic Studies; [email redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Curriculum

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Arya Marvazy, and I am a proud Iranian-Jewish full-time LGBTQ+ activist that currently serves as the Managing Director of LA-based non-profit JQ International (Jewish Queers). I am also proud of my Angeleno heritage born and raised in this great city and state. My parents fled antisemitic persecution in Iran in 1979 and arrived in the United States as stateless refugees. As Middle Eastern – Jewish immigrants my family members experience both antisemitism and xenophobia.

I would like to thank the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. I am a first-generation Middle Eastern Iranian-American Jew and identify [as one of the 500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage](#) who was ignored in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum. My family comes from a region that is racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse yet the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum fails to reflect Middle Eastern demographics both here and abroad.

As a Middle Eastern American and as an Iranian-Jewish person, I continue to face bigotry and discrimination in this country. In keeping with AB 2016's objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," my community, and the [more than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups](#) in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. As an Iranian-Jew (*with roots in Tehran*) I am both proudly Jewish and proudly Middle Eastern. My ancestors lived continuously in the Middle East for over 2,500 until they fled oppressive and systemic antisemitic persecution. In keeping with AB 2016's objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," my community, and the more than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I understand that this Thursday the Instructional Quality Commission of California's Department of Education will meet to review the second draft of your revised Ethnic Studies Curriculum. While the curriculum has improved, it still fails to include meaningful educational materials reflecting the ethnic and religious diversity of Middle Eastern-Americans and antisemitism.

Please consider these direct asks in your revisions of the next draft:

- All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, and other minority groups from the region [who together represent 60% of California's Middle Eastern population and have asked for inclusion](#). In order for the curriculum to avoid an essentialist understanding of Arabs and the Middle East, and in order to be well balanced, each group should be equally and equitably represented in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum.
- I would like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson plan, "[Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews](#)" produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, as it will provide students with high-quality instruction on

contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience. This lesson plan was written by a scholar of Middle Eastern education specifically to fit into California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

- The ESMC should make clear that under the “broadly defined umbrella of Asian Studies” are Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent ~60% of CA’s MENA population. California Department of Education’s Chapter 3 agrees: appropriate topics in the Asian section of Ethnic Studies courses are “the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners.”

Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration,

Arya

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