

From: Victoria Wong
Sent: Tuesday, May 26, 2020 7:18 PM
Cc: [emails redacted]; Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Save Ethnic Studies & Support the CA Model Curriculum

Dear Oakland Board Members,

How many of you know where, when and how “Asian American” came to be? Well, the term and concept of “Asian American” originated from the Asian American Political Alliance—the first Asian American organization ever, which I cofounded in May 1968 along with 5 other activists in a Berkeley studio one spring evening. Shockingly, most people still don’t know this profound fact—as it was even left out of the recent 5-episode documentary ironically called “Asian Americans”!

Fifty-one years ago, I sacrificed a period of my college education at UC Berkeley to be a proud participant of the Third World Liberation Front Strike in 1969—the longest strike in UC history. I felt then and I still feel today that peoples’ of color’s true herstories and histories need to be taught if we are ever going to live up to our declared values of a free, just and equal democratic society.

While nationwide Ethnic Studies was gained from our strike and others, it’s shameful that our children of color still do not seem to matter when it comes to even basic learning of our background, struggles and contributions to America and the world—especially from the crucial elementary to high school levels. That’s why it’s imperative to stop delaying and implement the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Just think of all the recent racist incidents directed at Asians during these pandemic times due to the ignorance of exactly what Ethnic Studies can teach us ALL about—that we have more in common as exploited and oppressed immigrants, workers, nationalities, and communities than differences and divisions—provoked by those in power who benefit from racism and ignorance.

I urge you to put “Students First” by supporting the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum led by scholars of color from across California. Oakland is exactly the kind of city that should stand up for our underrepresented communities.

Ethnic Studies has always been about empowering students of color who are marginalized and minimized by our curriculum. We need to bring this conversation back to the focus of Students First, one of our Core OUSD Values. Our white students greatly benefit from having these critical conversations about race, so that all Oaklanders can build skills to navigate our society and build stronger communities and neighborhoods.

Ethnic/Pacific Islander/Arab American/Central American Studies is important to me as a way to honor and respect all the Hawaiians, Iranians, Salvadorans, Samoans, Palestinians, Nicaraguans, and others from those regions who were always among the first to join our causes and support

AAPA, the TWLF Strike, the fight to save the International Hotel and Manilatown in SF, and other diverse community battles. They also inspired and taught us much about our entwined past, present and future.

This controversy is a perfect example of why we need Ethnic Studies and why we must have these conversations to address racial tensions in our community, so that we can move toward healing, understanding, and solidarity across all of our cultures.

Please vote YES, thank you!

Power to the People!

Victoria Wong, Asian American Political Alliance & Third World Liberation Front cofounder