

**From:** rachel wahba

**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 5:01 PM

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] CDE Ethnic Studies Curriculum

August 11, 2020

Dear members and all educators and assembly members associated with the new Ethnic Studies Curriculum,

My name is Rachel Wahba, LCSW, a proud California resident for the past fifty years. I am a social worker by trade, a mother and a grandmother, a graduate of San Francisco State University. My children and grandchildren have been educated in our schools.

I am an Egyptian-Iraqi Jew, an Arabic Jew, who with my parents dreamt of immigrating to the USA. It took us twenty years of waiting for our visa, as stateless Jews in Japan.

My parents fled hostile native lands. Financially life was harsh, and education for foreigners in Japan was expensive as we were not allowed into Japanese schools. I grew up in Catholic missionary schools where I was taught that a Jew would never enter Heaven and "see God" while Hitler being a baptized Christian would (if he repented "sincerely" a nanosecond before he died). I grew up with stories of my parents' lives as second class citizens always at risk of persecution, of witnessing pogroms (my mother) in the Farhud, the pogrom of 1941 in Baghdad where the Jews were slaughtered for a straight 48 hours. I grew up with a father who fled Egypt after he saw his beloved country fall in love with Hitler and *Mein Kampf*, a bestseller in Cairo's bookstores.

My brother and I grew up stateless because our parents' passports were cancelled because they were Jews. My brother and I grew up not only stateless, but suffered being called "*curombo*" the N-word in Japan because of our brown skin. Horrible and xenophobic.

And we found refuge in the United States when we were finally allowed to immigrate.

But we also found an incredible lack of education in the diversity of Jews here in the United States. Most Americans have zero information re. Arabic Jews, Jews from Arab lands, the Mizrahi Jews. We were there, predating Islam, and now as of the 1950's we have been ethnically cleansed from these lands. Almost one million Jews, ancient Jewish communities predating Islam, vanished.

It is time to remedy this level of ignorance, and talk about us as many of us, our children and grandchildren live in the United States today. It is time to elevate the history of ethnic minorities. It is time to understand Jews as a diverse People, an ethno religion, from every continent. Include Jews from Yemen, Jews from Ethiopia, Jews from Russia, from everywhere. It is way overdue and we finally have the chance to remedy ignorance.

All references to Middle Eastern and North African people in the curriculum need to include Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurdish people (Jews, Christians, Muslims), Iranians, Assyrians. Together, they represent 60% of California's Middle Eastern population. All are asking for INCLUSION. Anything short of this is cherry picking for political motives that has no place in education. We ALL deserve to be seen and understood. 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.

Thank you,  
Rachel Wahba  
[address redacted]  
Larkspur, California