

Dear 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,

On behalf of Pacific Islander educators in California, I am submitting comments in response to the current Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and Appendix B. I write to express grave concerns regarding the lack of Pacific Islander AND Arab American Studies representation in the latest draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I am a daughter of Sāmoa - my dad Opetaiā Joseph Loi-On, came from the village of Satupa'itea in Samoa on the island of Savai'i and my mom Caroline Siaki Lealaimatafao, from the village of Ili Ili in American Samoa on the island of Tutuila. As a K-12 student I grew up moving from city to city, dealt with the losses of my father, sister, and best friend and attended over 13 schools where none of those spaces focused on the histories and stories of Pacific Islanders. In my last year of high school, my counselor helped to sign me up for an Ethnic Studies course centered in Filipina/o American Studies with Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP). Through an oral history project I was able to learn about how hard my grandfather worked to provide for his family, and made connections of imperialism to migration and identity. I was able to talk about losing my sister, and really feel comfortable speaking up in a classroom because my teachers were not only vulnerable and authentic, but also so supportive.

My PEP teachers inspired me to transfer to San Francisco State University (SFSU) where I received my Bachelor's in History with a minor in Race & Resistance Studies. After a tough first semester in college I enrolled in a course at City College of San Francisco in what is now the Critical Pacific Islands Studies program. I signed up for the M.A. program at SFSU because Pacific Islander students were advocating for Pacific Studies in the College of Ethnic Studies. After working collectively with students, scholars, community members, and campus leaders we were able to create a minor in Critical Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies and hire two tenure track faculty members - Dr. Ponipate Rokolekutu and Dr. Leora Kava.

All of these spaces have helped guide me towards where I am today. As a second-generation mixed-Samoan woman, I have encountered and witnessed the struggles of being Pacific Islander in the (continental) United States within the institution of education.

I urge the CDE Curriculum Team and Instructional Quality Commission to pass an ESMC that includes Pacific Islander and Arab American studies curriculum moving forward and work with the respective communities to ensure this happens. 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.

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

Sincerely,

Levalasi Loi-On,

Student Success Coordinator, Asian American & Pacific Islander Student Services
San Francisco State University

Faculty, Critical Pacific Islands & Oceania Studies
City College of San Francisco