

**From:** Gabriella Lerman

**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 9:00 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; Superintendent; [emails redacted]

**Subject:** CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum: Include Arab and Pacific Islanders Studies!

To the California Department of Education, State Board of Education, and members of the Instructional Quality Commission.

I am a rising senior at Berkeley High School and a mixed Jewish-Venezulan person. I am writing today to support the original California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft of August 2019, and to advocate for the implementation of an authentic ethnic studies program in California high schools.

**The importance of learning about marginalized communities in an empowering way is immense.** During high school I got to take Afro-Haitian Dance and a Chicana-Latina Literature courses. Both of these classes focused on the strength, beauty and power that Black/Brown communities have. As a result, my Black and Brown classmates were given a safe space to reflect upon the impact racist narratives had on their identities. For the first time ever, students of color were given the chance to talk about their communities, experiences and culture while everyone else had to listen. I was given the opportunity to hear my peers recount experiences navigating racism in the classroom and other experiences I wasn't familiar with. Through this opportunity, I was able to understand the significance of being a white Latina person and began the process of confronting my white guilt. **Without a doubt these classes have transformed my identity and made me a better person.**

Sadly this opportunity to explore identity and gain confidence has been

denied to all Arabs and Pacific Islanders who are a part of California's Education system. Additionally **you are refusing to address issues of Xenophobia that are prevalent in the lives of Arabs and Pacific Islanders.**

In the past years, my Arab friends at school have been told when they were speaking Arabic that they were terrorists. At school their friends who wear Hijabi's were yelled at, and some people even took off their Hijabs. The association with predominantly Muslim countries and terrorism is something that has never been questioned or tackled in the classroom.

Additionally, as Jewish person with some Zionst family members and some super Pro-Palestine cousins **I feel angered that people are allowing their personal politics with Palestine to direct what happens to ALL of Arab Studies.** I would be devastated if people in my life refused to learn about my Jewish culture because they had issues with Israel yet that's exactly what's happening to Palestinians. I believe it's essential to learn about Palestine and Arab people because people will continue to hate, hurt and even kill Arab people if they are ignorant.

Additionally, I am devastated that we are taking out another essential part of our curriculum that focuses on Pacific Islanders who have made huge contributions to California! **This includes Filipinos who have been an integral part of California working incredibly hard as farm workers and various other noble occupations for decades.** Interestingly, almost half of all Filipino Americans live in California and they are one of the largest groups of Asian Americans in California( Demographics of Filipino Americans - Wikipedia).

One of my best friends is Filipina and just the other day she was saying that her AP US history class spent two days learning about the Philippines. During this time, they learned how colonizers killed and destroyed the Philippines. Additionally, during this brief unit the teacher referred to Filipinos as savages.

**I know for a fact that there is no empowering learning in the California education system that includes Pacific Islanders, and Arab people which is why this curriculum is so important.**

I strongly believe this change to the proposed curriculum is not an improvement. In many ways, It feels as though you are giving up on my friends who have been desperately looking to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. **You are harming California in such imaginable ways, and I feel devastated that my community( Jewish and Latinx) will be getting our stories told while my friends won't.**

Nothing can change the fact that these communities are essential to the success of California and need to be included in this proposal. **This is a tragedy and that is what this ethnic studies program will be remembered as.**

Please include Arab and Pacific Islander Studies in our California education!!

Best Wishes,

Gabriella Domingo Lerman