

**From:** Brooke Lober

**Sent:** Sunday, July 26, 2020 11:05 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; [email redacted]

**Cc:** Superintendent

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support for Arab-American Studies and Palestinian representation in California Schools

To the California Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the President of the State Board of Education,

I am writing to express my support both for the inclusion of Arab American Studies in the Ethnic Studies curriculum for California, as an essential component of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies more broadly. I write this as the parent of a high school student at Oakland Technical High School, and as a member of the Jewish community in Oakland, where I'm a member of Kehilla Synagogue.

I believe that my daughter, who is Ashkenazi Jewish and Mexican, shares this with all of her fellow students: she will benefit immensely from an ethnic studies education that highlights multiple histories of people of color, including Arab American people, honestly considering the ways that they arrived here in the Americas, and what their current struggles and ongoing cultural conditions are.

As a study of empire and militarism, Asian American studies is in a very meaningful developed dialogue with Arab American and Middle Eastern diaspora studies. For the last 50 years, ethnic studies formations have arisen to highlight the comparative and relational realities of ethnic and racialized life in the U.S. In this framing, Asian American studies emphasizes the role of US empire and war in the travels of transnational migrants who live in the U.S. as diasporic subjects. There are profound affinities across West and East Asian formations that can be meaningfully highlighted for young people gaining global perspectives on U.S. populations through both Asian American studies, and Arab American studies.

Finally, I want to oppose the argument that Jewish studies, normatively tracing Jewish immigration from Europe to the Americas, must be included alongside studies of Black, Native, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latinx studies in this curriculum. While Jewish people are an ethnic minority in the U.S., comprised of mostly Ashkenazi Jewish people--like my family who immigrated to the Americas fleeing genocide and war in the early-mid 20th century--there is already mandated teaching on our history and position, which is taught in both junior high and high school in California. We are commonly understood to have been racialized "white" not long after immigration, entering a racial structure that was already in formation in the U.S. Therefore, this group of ethnic people, as such, does not need its stories told as a part of the history of people of color in the United States.

On the other hand, Arab and Middle Eastern Jewish histories are rarely if ever brought up in K-12 education, or beyond. I believe that the institutionalization of Arab American

Studies, emphasizing Palestinian narratives that trace Israeli settler colonialism, may open up a space for many diverse ethnicities of Middle Eastern diasporas to be discussed in the classroom. The topic of Zionism, and its rearrangement of populations in the Middle East, would be a way to understand how Middle Eastern Jewish people also comprise multiple diasporas, some of whom have immigrated to the U.S.

Most importantly, ethnic studies is meant to offer a window into studies that ought to be foundational and are too often marginal. These are studies of the ideas and practices of people of color in the U.S. and beyond: people whose practices of resilience are the basis of ethnic studies in ideology and practice. The institutionalization of ethnic studies, which includes and emphasizes Arab American studies, is potentially life changing and deeply affirming for Arab American students, who surely deserve--as all others--to participate in an education that bears meaning for their lives. I urge you to approve the curriculum that offers this possibility.

I appreciate your attention to this matter! I am here and available to discuss it further.

Sincerely,

Brooke Lober

Oakland school parent, and member of Oakland Jewish community