

From: Micael Navarro Lopez
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2021 3:23 PM
To: Micael Navarro Lopez
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Arab American Studies

Dear Commissioners and Instructional Leaders,
I am a citizen and voter in El Cerrito, and I have beloved family members from Iran, as well as many close friends, teachers, and neighbors who immigrated from countries in the Middle East to the U.S.

I'm writing to you as education leaders in our state, with two demands that will address the fact that unfortunately the CA Department of Education is not living up to its mandate to create a Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum as outlined by AB2016.

The Arab American Studies must be significantly *revised* and also *returned* to its rightful place in Asian American Studies, from its current placement in an appendix of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Consistent with a decades-long tradition in higher education, the original ESMC did include Arab American Studies *within* Asian American Studies. Leading Ethnic Studies scholars, including Angela Davis, Robin D.G. Kelley, and the National Association of Asian American Studies, have issued statements defending the inclusion of Arab American Studies in the ESMC.

Worse--the content of the Arab American Studies portion of ESMC is deeply flawed, including extremely problematic "perspectives" on racism. Since the CDE disbanded the original, highly qualified advisory committee, the ESMC has become a problematic "All Lives Matter" curriculum. It now bears no relationship to the values and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated or moved to footnotes. There are now several definitions of race, including one giving credence to race as based on biology rather than social construction. The anti-racist and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of language about inclusion, and disturbingly, the experiences of Arab Americans have been erased.

This year marks 20 years since the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. For two decades, Muslim, Sikh, and people perceived as Arab Americans have experienced violent and repeated attacks, as well as unfair interpersonal backlash and community marginalization, including in California and on our college and university campuses.

A high quality, accurate curriculum for Arab American Studies serves *vital* functions, including educating students about ancient and modern cultures, and creating a more inclusive society where Muslim people can be seen, feel safe, and participate and contribute fully as citizens, residents, and visitors.

When the U.S. federal government continues to wage wars and supply perpetrators of violent destruction across countries in the Middle East, it's absolutely imperative that our California government serve as leaders and teach our students about these deep, rich histories and their cultural and political relevance today.

I urge you to reject the current slate of offensive curriculum revisions, and to restore Arab American Studies to its rightful place in the Asian American Studies curriculum. You can help protect and honor our neighbors, family and friends who have sustained hardship and violence, and yet who continue to be stalwart positive, peaceful, and deeply engaged members of our communities.

Thank you and thanks to your staff for your time and consideration,
Micael

--

Micael Navarro Lopez
Pronouns: they/them/theirs