

From: SARA KERSHNAR

Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 11:58 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Cc: Superintendent; [emails redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect California's Ethnic Studies Curriculum!

Dear CA Board of Education's Instructional Quality Commission,

My son is entering the California public school system as a Kindergartener this Fall. He has already participated in public pre-school. For me, ethnic studies and social justice curriculum are as crucial as his learning to read, mathematics and science.

He comes from a family of Jewish ancestries with a long commitment to social justice. For us, Jewish ethics and values, which is also part of what he is learning at home, holds treating ones neighbors as you yourself would like to be treated as central. I have joined his pre-school to bring Jewish holidays with this theme to his classroom. We talk about how Hanuka is about the underdog standing up for what they believe in, about how Passover is about the liberation for all those whose freedom is being denied in today's world.

Our family stands against inequity and discrimination of all kinds – we attend Black Lives Matters protests, we challenge antisemitism when we have faced it as a Jewish family, we challenge homophobia when we have faced that as a queer family.

For our family, an important part of this is his learning about ethnic studies and the diversity of experience in the world is Arab-American studies. The human rights of Palestinian people is a part of this. We hold dear the Jewish history of participation of many struggles for liberation – from Labor struggles to anti-fascist struggles to civil rights struggles. I do not want my son to be denied Palestinian history or the history of Arab-Americans and their current experiences of discrimination, occupation, war and repression.

I believe that our job and the job of our institutions is to raise children who can think critically, who see the world from the perspective of the many who live in it and to cherish justice and human rights. Excluding Arab-American studies and denying Palestinian history is similar to the ways in which slavery was “whitewashed” and denied in our history curriculum for years, the obscuring of the history of the internment of the Japanese and the use of the atom bomb against Japan, and the denial of the holocaust.

When I was a student, I had to take on a history teacher who did just that – deny the holocaust. I do not want my son to have to take on the denial of Palestinian or other Arab-American history. I want his exposure to these histories to be validated.

I want my son to learn about today's movements for justice – from Black Lives Matter to transgender rights to anti-Dam protests in India to the anti-apartheid struggle in Palestine. Ethnic studies has always played a crucial role in preparing children to live as equals in a diverse world and to hold dear the movements for justice towards this goal.

I have high standards for California's public schools. I hope that the IQC will not disappoint me and my son and the many who have struggled for the right for students to have access to ethnic studies.

Please keep the curriculum as it stands. To exclude Arab-American studies would be an act of intentional exclusion of some of the communities most impacted by racism, discrimination and human rights violations at the moment. It is unacceptable.

Thank you for your attention and please reply to my comments and request.

Sincerely,
Sara Kershner