

California K-12 Educators Statement of Support of Arab American Studies, West Asian Studies, and Palestine in ESMC

We as California K-12 educators know firsthand the power of a curriculum that acknowledges, reflects, and affirms student identities in the classroom.

- We know that when students' experiences and ancestral legacies are made visible to them in school, they are more likely to engage with content, and thus are more likely to succeed academically and grow emotionally (Smith 2018).
- We know that when students have a bridge—rather than a disconnect—between their home life, language, and identity, and school life, they feel empowered to be vulnerable, to learn, and to hope (Sleeter 2011).
- We also know that when students learn and witness the experiences and ancestral legacies of their classmates, connections are built and there is a positive development in understanding the world beyond their own perspectives and lives (Carmona and Bernal 2012).

This pedagogical approach works (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014), and yet there are many students who are still not reflected in the curriculum—particularly students of West Asian ancestry. In a survey conducted among ninth grade students in the Oakland area who had taken an Ethnic Studies class, [“Arab American students most disagreed with the statement that the courses offered to them reflected their history and culture”](#) (Davies Samway 2020). While Ethnic Studies' aim is to reflect all students' communities and to critique the dominant narrative of our country (Yosso 2002), **curriculum gaps like this continue to exist**. As educators, we believe it is our job to continually expand upon the wealth and scope of narratives from which we teach in order to close such gaps. If we are to teach and care for all of our students equitably, West Asian American historical narratives and students' current lived experiences must be present in the curriculum. Their lives are part of our [collective history](#) (Takaki 1993), and our collective hystories and herstories as well, which are purposeful alternate spellings we also use in Ethnic Studies, and which should remain in the model curriculum.

We acknowledge that discussions of this area of the world can be politically fraught and thus difficult to navigate. We cannot, however, allow this to interfere with our students' lives, and cause students to feel that their existence is politically fraught and difficult to navigate. We cannot perpetuate the fear that students' personal and familial experiences with the Muslim Ban and immigration detention, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, surveillance and criminalization, territorial disputes, and refugee status are inappropriate or too complicated to be taught in their classes. We acknowledge that there is much work to be done in order to better educate ourselves and to adequately teach these stories in a manner that is humanizing and identity-affirming (del Carmen Salazar 2013). We have chosen to lean into that work instead of cower from it.

In support of our West Asian American students and communities, we as California K-12 educators:

- Support the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Draft as Ethnic Studies, and specifically Asian American Studies, which is work that thinks through colonialism, imperialism, and racialization.
- Affirm using the [Guiding Values, Principles, and Outcomes of Teaching Ethnic Studies](#) as the core of the curriculum, its reference throughout, and that all lessons and lesson templates should be aligned to it—this is Ethnic Studies.
- Affirm that West Asian American Studies is Asian American Studies, as Asian American Studies is work that thinks through colonialism, imperialism, and racialization. West Asian American Studies has precedence in Asian American Studies (Maira and Shihade 2006).
- Defend Arab American Studies and Palestine as Ethnic Studies, as Asian American Studies is work that thinks through colonialism, imperialism, and racialization. Any Asian-American Studies must get to the heart of issues of power and oppression.
- Agree that the curriculum must engage scholars and communities directly on the portions that address them.
- Believe that the original writers of the curriculum must be consulted in order to stay true to the charge of Ethnic Studies to dismantle white supremacy, epistemic violence, and erasure.

Signed,

Eunice Ho
History, 7th/8th
Santa Ana Unified School District
Ethnic Studies Educator

Rachel Muntz
World History, High School
Los Angeles Unified School District
Ethnic Studies Educator, Jewish person of color

Aviva Alvarez-Zakson
Social Studies, High School
Los Angeles Unified School District
Ethnic Studies educator, Jewish person of color

Guadalupe Cardona
English, theater, Ethnic Studies 9-12
Los Angeles Unified School District

Mike Rodriguez
History/Ethnic Studies, High School
Santa Ana Unified School District

Luis Lira
English 12th
Los Angeles Unified School District

Xitlaly Sanchez
Social Science 7/8th
Anaheim Unified High School District
Ethnic Studies Educator

Roselinn Lee
Secondary History Social Science
Santa Ana Unified School District
Curriculum Specialist, member of original ES model curriculum committee

Brian Tabatabai
Ethnic Studies, 9th
El Monte Unified High School District

Jocelyn Gomez

English, 11th
Los Angeles Unified School District
Educator of color: Latina

Grace Diaz
English 11/12th
San Bernardino City Unified School District
Ethnic Studies-trained educator

Nikki Isaacs
4th Grade
Los Angeles Unified School District

Allisón Chalco
Art/9th-12th
Los Angeles Unified School District

Susan Requa
English, 9th grade
Los Angeles Unified School District

Vivian Quan
ETK (Expanded Transitional Kindergarten)
Los Angeles Unified School District

Antonia Garcia
Dual Language Kindergarten
Los Angeles Unified School District

Brittney Holt
English/High School
Garden Grove Unified School District

Claire Stringer
1st grade teacher
Los Angeles Unified School District

Michael Dang
Math (7th and 8th)
Los Angeles Unified School District
Ethnic Studies practitioner

Nanor Aghamal

10th ELA
Los Angeles Unified School District

Cristina Cortes
Multiple Subjects/ 4th grade
Los Angeles Unified School District

Melissa Lundberg
English 8th
Los Angeles Unified School District

Michael Gamboa
Social Studies/10th and 11th
Los Angeles Unified School District

Michael Ng
Chemistry 9-12
Los Angeles Unified School District

Citations

- Carmona, J. F., & Bernal, D. D. (2012). Oral Histories in the Classroom. *Creating solidarity across diverse communities: International perspectives in education*, 114.
- del Carmen Salazar, M. (2013). A humanizing pedagogy reinventing the principles and practice of education as a journey toward liberation. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 121-148.
- Maira, S., & Shihade, M. (2006). Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9(2), 117-140. doi:10.1353/jaas.2006.0015.
- Samway, K. (2020, July 29). OUSD Board of Education Supports California Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Including Arab American Studies, But May be Cut from State Curriculum. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://oaklandvoices.us/2020/07/29/ousd-board-of-education-supports-california-draft-ethnic-studies-model-curriculum-including-arab-american-studies-but-may-be-cut-from-state-curriculum/>.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2011). The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A Research Review. National Education Association Research Department.
- Smith, A. A. (2018, July 9). San Francisco State finds evidence that ethnic studies students do better. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/09/san-francisco-state-finds-evidence-ethnic-studies-students-do-better>.
- Takaki, R. (1993). *A Different Mirror*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Yosso, T. J. (2002). Toward a critical race curriculum. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 93-107.