

From: Aimee Riechel
Sent: Thursday, November 12, 2020 8:59 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - ESMC

Dear members of the Instructional Quality Commission

My name is Aimee Riechel and I am a former member of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee. I'm frustrated and disheartened to hear that elected officials decided to exclude Arab Americans from California's high school ethnic studies curriculum by relegating the Arab American lesson to the appendix of the curriculum, insisting on the inclusion of extremely problematic "perspectives" on racism, and by not consulting experts on the revisions to the overall curriculum.

If the biggest education system in the United States decides Arab-American Studies and ethnic studies are a "problem," we're going to face a dire precedent. I'm emailing you to ask that you please reject adopting these offensive revisions.

I completely support the TURATH (Teaching Understanding and Representing Arabs Throughout History) is a 2020 report researched and written by the teenage members of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center. This vital report found that only 2.3% of students surveyed learned about Arabs and/or Muslims at school. If there was ever a time that we should be protecting anti-racist education, and ensuring students learn about struggles of indigenous and racialized communities at school, as part of their formal and peer-group education it is now.

As experts in the field, the members of the advisory committee made sure the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum was structured around the core pillars developed by the founders of Ethnic Studies in 1969: American Indian studies, Africana/Black studies, Chicana/Latina studies, and Asian American studies. Following a decades-long tradition in higher education, the ESMC includes Arab American studies within Asian American studies. This hard-fought legacy, coming with great sacrifices from civil right and social justice movements must be honored. Arab American studies must find it rightful and powerful place in Asian American studies.

Leading Asian American scholars, including the National Association of Asian American studies, have issued statements defending the inclusion of Arab American studies in the CA ESMC. Ethnic Studies has been linked to increases in positive personal, academic, and social outcomes for students. And in the post-9/11 era, exacerbated by Trump's Muslim ban, Arab American students are desperately in need of curriculum that reflects their histories and current realities.

Furthermore, the racial disparities in the impact of COVID-19, the xenophobic targeting of Asian Americans as "vectors" of disease, and the national uprising in response to the murder of George Floyd point to the need for anti-racist education: All students need comprehensive Ethnic Studies in their K-12 curriculum to build empathy, unity and solidarity with each other, strengthening our movements for justice.

In these times of change and possibility, I ask that you please reject adopting the unfortunate and offensive revisions made to this curriculum, to restore Arab-American Studies to its rightful place, and to work ethnic studies experts who have shaped this powerful and critical area of study for our students. If you decide otherwise, I would ask that you reconsider calling the curriculum, Ethnic Studies, because it is far from any course that fits within the discipline.

Thank you,
Aimee Riechel