

Chair, Soomin Chao  
Instructional Quality Commission  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

August 14, 2019

**RE: Protect and improve Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum**

Dear California Department of Education Instructional Quality Commission,

On behalf of the California Southeast Asian American (SEAA) Collaborative led by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, SEARAC, we write for two purposes -

1. To urge you to protect the movement and progress of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, and
2. To provide comments on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, specifically on the Asian American history section to include a much more comprehensive curriculum of the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in California.

The California Southeast Asian American Collaborative is the only California wide SEAA coalition consisting of 12 SEAA-serving organizations from Butte County to Orange County. We are a coalition that seeks to impact local and statewide policy change in issue areas concerning criminal justice, health, education, immigration, and Census. We are led by SEARAC, a national civil rights organization that empowers Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese American communities to create a socially just and equitable society.

The Southeast Asian American (SEAA) community is the largest refugee community ever to be resettled in the United States. We now number over 3.1 million in the country today, with one million calling California home.<sup>1</sup> SEAA communities continue to experience low educational attainment where 38.3% of Laotian, 38.2% of Cambodian, 36% of Hmong, and 26.8% of Vietnamese Americans do not have a high school diploma, compared to just 18.5% of total adults in California.<sup>2</sup>

We applaud the California Department of Education's effort to implement AB 2016 (Alejo) in a timely manner by convening a Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee and developing a draft of the model curriculum. **We urge you to protect and improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum despite uninformed opposition from some media and other specialized interest groups.** For the past 50 years, students, faculty, families, and communities have fought extensively for ethnic studies to be a legitimate academic discipline. Research shows that taking an ethnic studies course can increase school attendance, grade-point average, and the amount of school credits a student earns.<sup>3</sup>

We believe that California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum must be robust and reflect the diverse populations that make up California, including the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, each group alone or in combination

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau, 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/>

where school districts can pull curricula of relevant communities into their classrooms. Unfortunately, we do not see that reflected in the current model curriculum.

We request that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum include the following critical content -

- Include curriculum on the third world Liberation Front (twLF) in San Francisco and Berkeley, as they were the pioneers of the ethnic studies movement. We would not be discussing CA's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum today without the work they started decades ago.
  - Include historical Asian American community activism organizations, such as Asian American Political Alliance, Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, Red Guards, Wei Min She/Asian Community Center, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.
- Include curriculum covering the Iu-Mien, Japanese, Korean, Lao, South Asian, and Vietnamese American communities. It is unacceptable that there is no mention of these American communities in the curriculum.
- There is very little curriculum on the Cambodian and Hmong American communities. We need curriculum that explore the immigrant and refugee experiences of these communities that discusses the discrimination and resiliency these communities have faced as Americans. We appreciate in the inclusion of how deportation impacts the Cambodian American community and the gender dynamics in the Hmong American community. We need curriculum that also explores the impact of communities arriving to the US as refugees.
- The Asian American curriculum lacks appropriate class work and homework that would provide students different modalities to digest information and deepen their understanding and analysis of what they are learning.
- Not only does ethnic studies require the learning of ethnic and racial groups, but they should also discuss how systems, such as capitalism, white supremacy, etc., and the multiplicity and intersectionality of our identities (i.e. race, gender, age, sexuality, class, etc.), impact society.
- The appendices are not integrated into the curriculum. The curriculum needs to state how to use the appendices appropriately.
- There is not a uniform structure of each "lesson" in the curriculum. Some units are developed, while others are less comprehensive and thorough.

We, the undersigned, urge the Instructional Quality Commission to protect the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, carefully review the curriculum, and make the appropriate changes and additions we have proposed above. These changes will be crucial to the success of the students from school districts that will turn to

this model curriculum for guidance. We look forward to continuing this partnership as we seek to ensure that all students in California public schools are able to learn about their history and each other's histories to obtain cultural awareness, self-determination, and community.

For questions or more information, please contact Nkauj Iab Yang at [nkaujiab@searac.org](mailto:nkaujiab@searac.org).

Sincerely,

Mona Afary  
Executive Director  
Center for Empowering Refugees and  
Immigrants  
Oakland, California

Lian Cheun  
Executive Director  
Khmer Girls in Action  
Long Beach, California

Seng Yang  
Executive Director  
Hmong Cultural Center of Butte County  
Butte County, California

Nkauj Iab Yang  
Director of California Policy and Programs  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Sacramento, California

Cha Vang  
Executive Director  
Hmong Innovating Politics  
Sacramento, California

Pao Yang  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Fresno Center  
Fresno, California

Susana Sngiem  
Executive Director  
United Cambodian Communities  
Long Beach, California

