

**From:** Jody Sokolower

**Sent:** Friday, November 13, 2020 10:12 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; Superintendent

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] ESMC Public Comment: Use Arab American lesson from original advisory committee

I am a retired Berkeley High ethnic studies teacher, the parent of a Berkeley High graduate, and a teacher educator at San Jose State. I strongly urge you to return Arab American studies to the Asian American section of the ESMC, and to use the lesson Superintendent Thurmond requested from the original ESMC advisory committee.

As a high school ethnic studies and social studies teacher, I saw what a profound impact it had, not only on my Palestinian students, but on my students from Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, and other countries in the Arab and Muslim world, when I addressed Palestine directly. Many of them told me it was the first time they felt seen at school.

Speaking as secondary school teacher and teacher educator, I want to stress how important it is to base Arab American lessons, and all lessons about racialized populations, on the principles and values of ethnic studies, including a decolonial understanding of resistance. When lessons are focused on identifying stereotypes, as is the current Arab American lesson in the appendix, it casts youth and their communities as victims. This is often a triggering experience for students who have experienced racist and Islamophobic attacks and microaggressions at school and elsewhere, and can lead to further alienation from school. It is the opposite of empowerment. This is exactly why Arab American curriculum, and all ethnic studies curriculum, needs to be written by ethnic studies educators and practitioners, in close collaboration with the communities most impacted.

Thank you.

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Jody Sokolower

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