

From: National Pacific Islander Education Network
Sent: Monday, August 10, 2020 9:15 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The purpose of this letter is to urge you to include Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) in the Ethnic Studies curriculum. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought about a self-examination of the inequities experienced by Black Americans, as well as all communities of color. NHPI students lack role models in education from their community. I am a Samoan American, and never had a teacher from my community. This is my 36th year as a K-12 educator, and for most of my career never met another NHPI teacher or school administrator. Too often Pacific Islanders are stereotyped as "athletes and entertainers." These stereotypes do not promote higher education for a community where only 18% of our adults hold a college degree. We have a rich history, tradition and culture that our students, and all students need to learn about. Our islands are some of the most visited in the world, yet few know much about our people. We are a people who navigated the oceans in simple vessels. We are a people that demonstrate empathy towards others and compassionate leadership, and we understand the Village concept in caring for others.

Dr. Martin Luther King had visited Hawai'i and was impressed that the people understood integration works, and became very good friends with Reverend Abraham Akaka. Reverend Akaka sent flower lei to Dr. King and his fellow marchers at Selma, in March 1965, to lift their spirits. Jeffrey Akaka, Reverend Akaka's son, said Dr. King's work epitomized his father's definition of Aloha: the unconditional regard for your fellow human being. He said, "That's the message my father and Dr. King and everyone who fights for equality among everybody stood for and that's what we want to continue fighting for." The Spirit of Aloha is needed in the K-12 curriculum and we urge you to include us.

Sincerely,

National Pacific Islander Education Network (NPIEN)
Victor C. Thompson, Ed.D., Executive Director