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**From:** K.F.

**Sent:** Wednesday, August 12, 2020 9:42 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; Superintendent

**Cc:** [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Include Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies in CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Honorable California State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and Board of Education President, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond:

I am a full-time instructor and chair of the Ethnic Studies department at Chabot College, a community college in Hayward, CA. Ethnic Studies at Chabot College is relatively new, but the college supported the inception of this program after recognizing the importance of offering curricula that celebrates and recognizes the cultures, histories, and achievements of our students.

The majority of Chabot students and I have been educated by the California public education system, and the feeling of being miseducated about our own histories is a common and constant narrative that many students share to this day, due to the centering of Eurocentric curriculum. Once in college, we experienced first hand the powerful impact Ethnic Studies curriculum can have on countering hate, injustice, and centering love, respect, community, and value for our heritage. By centering on the philosophies, histories, cultures, and most especially the resistance movements of BIPOC communities, Ethnic Studies students are trained in critical thinking skills. Students are taught to value their own experiences and voice, in developing their own thought processes, and to learn and practice fighting for what they believe in, including relevant curricula and representation in our education. ***The issue is representation, relevance, equity, and historical reality, not political correctness.***

Understanding this, our Ethnic Studies program at Chabot was still lacking, as we had African American, Latinx, Chicano, Native American, and Asian American history classes, but no courses specifically focused on Arab American Studies or Pacific Islander Studies. I've received feedback from many Arab American and Pacific Islander students who were happy to take Ethnic Studies courses, but disappointed and frustrated that the specific histories of their communities were once again marginalized. Luckily at Chabot, we had incredible Pacific Islander student leadership who were tired of being ignored and decided to do something about it. These students created their own club, Nesians United, and began mobilizing other Pacific Islander students at Chabot and in surrounding neighborhoods. Their advocacy soon led to a demand for an Ethnic Studies course focused on Pacific Islander studies and the students got to work. We worked together to research sources, books, lesson plans, and syllabi and co-wrote a course titled "Intro to Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies." And now we're proud to share that this very course that the students helped develop will be taught in the Fall. Now, we need to work on developing an Arab American Studies course.

***Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies IS Ethnic Studies and MUST be included in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum course outline. And Palestine MUST be included.*** How many more generations of Arab American and Pacific Islander youth must feel neglected, forgotten, and ignored? This is the time to make an impact. As one of my favorite social justice leaders and activists, Linda Sarsour, reflected on her childhood experiences in her recently published memoir, *We Are Not Here to Be Bystanders*, none of her classmates knew where Palestine was and couldn't even find it on the map. Sarsour wrote, "...I felt almost invisible....How do you tell an eighth grader that the reason he never read about your homeland in the school's history books is because your people's land was stolen in a war in 1948, the year your father was born, the same year Israel declared independence and expelled 750,000 Palestinians from their homes, barring them from returning?" California has been given the opportunity to change this narrative which has become too common among students of color, especially Arab American and Pacific Islander youth.

Furthermore, I demand that you convene the original committee of writers and experts to revise the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. It's simply a slap in the face of Ethnic Studies scholars and teachers, who've dedicated their lives to contributing to this field, to be excluded from writing the actual curriculum for the state of California. No other academic discipline would ever consider having people without professional background in their field write their curriculum.

Next, I demand that you maintain the Ethnic Studies framework with the disciplinary knowledge, language and pedagogy. Ethnic Studies is not the same as multicultural studies - we follow a specific framework and foundational principles around action, community engagement, love, and solidarity. What's the point in learning about injustices if we aren't also teaching our students how to make change happen in our communities?

Finally, I demand that you work with clear structures for accountability, transparency, and consensus-building. Ethnic Studies is a bottom-up people based movement and advocates will not accept a behind-closed-doors, top-down process.

Kay Fischer, M.A.  
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Chabot College