

**From:** Kate Raphael

**Sent:** Wednesday, November 11, 2020 6:28 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>; Superintendent; [email redacted]

**Cc:** AROC [email redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Commission members,

I'm writing to express concern about the direction that the model Ethnic Studies curriculum seems to be going. I am concerned that the recommended curriculum does not reflect the intent of those who originally brought forward the need for Ethnic Studies in California schools, nor the needs of the students in California schools.

Ethnic Studies needs to be a vehicle for students – who in California are predominately people of color and/or children or grandchildren of immigrants from colonized countries – to understand their own history and place in this country. It should not celebrate some idealized melting pot, but examine the real economic, political and cultural struggles of racial and ethnic minorities in California. This needs to be in the context of the real history of US settlement, slavery, expansion and imperialism, as well as economic and social development. It needs to have a racial justice lens, as we all want a more just and equal California. The original model curriculum submitted provided this crucial framework, but the watered-down version now proposed does not.

I'm particularly concerned that Arab American studies has been removed from where it belongs, within Asian American studies, and placed in the appendix. Arab American students are not appendices to our communities, they are part of them, and the curriculum should reflect that. I'm further dismayed that the model curriculum embraces a definition of "anti-Semitism" that falsely conflates criticism of Israel with oppression of Jews. This definition has been rightly rejected by the California legislature and its inclusion here would send a dangerous message to teachers and students in our schools.

As a Jewish American, I believe Jewish students will benefit by learning more about Arab and Arab American histories and struggles against colonialism and for liberation. Some of it may be painful for them, as some of the histories of settler colonialism will be painful for white students, but education is not about shielding students from painful lessons. It's about teaching the liberatory power of facing the truth of our histories and accepting responsibility for joining struggles for justice. This is part of the guiding principle of Ethnic Studies, and California needs to lead the way in teaching it to our students.

I urge you to include the Arab American studies lesson plan proposed by the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee, in your model curriculum, and to follow the framework set out by that curriculum to create a program that centers the liberatory potential of racial justice.

Sincerely,

Kate Raphael  
Oakland, CA