

From: Deni Asnis

Sent: Friday, July 31, 2020 6:10 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Arab American students need to learn their histories

Dear Ethnic Studies Open Comment,

I was a teacher for over 20 years in San Francisco. I worked in elementary schools and taught a variety of students, including Arab students. I read aloud every day to my students, a favorite time for all of us. It was an opportunity to share with students a reflection of their own cultures and communities and expose them to those different than their own. Among the many story books I read, there were several excellent picture books that featured Arab children, one in particular *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* that expresses a child's delight in learning to write his name, through moving text and illustrations of his life in Egypt. When I read this book, the Arab students in my class would react with a kind of joy, having never before seen a book that reflected their own culture and lives. This was yet another profound lesson for me in the importance of introducing concepts of Ethnic Studies at a very young age, and particularly the inclusion of Arab American Studies within that. In my particular case, I was also able to model that as a teacher who happened to be Jewish, there was no contradiction in being Jewish and participating in and supporting the inclusion of Arab American studies within the curriculum, and that in fact, both those enriched my students' understanding and compassion in the world. It's never been clearer how important Ethnic Studies is and I urge you to support the inclusion of Arab American studies in the Asian American studies curriculum.

The racial disparities in the impact of Covid-19, the xenophobic targeting of Asian Americans as "vectors" of disease, and the national uprising in response to the murder of George Floyd point to the need for anti-racist education: All students need comprehensive Ethnic Studies in their K-12 curriculum to build empathy, unity and solidarity with each other, strengthening our movements for justice.

The ESMC is structured around the core pillars developed by the founders of Ethnic Studies in 1969: American Indian studies, Africana/Black studies, Chicanx/Latinx studies, and Asian American studies. Following a decades-long tradition in higher education, the ESMC includes Arab American studies within Asian American studies.

Leading Asian American scholars, including the National Association of Asian American studies, have issued statements defending the inclusion of Arab American studies in the CA ESMC.

Ethnic Studies has been linked to increases in positive personal, academic, and social outcomes for students.

In the post-9/11 era, exacerbated by Trump's Muslim ban, Arab American students are desperately in need of curriculum that reflects their histories and current realities.

TURATH (Teaching Understanding and Representing Arabs Throughout History) is a 2020 report researched and written by the teenage members of Arab Youth Organizing (AYO). According to AYO's findings, more than 66% of the students surveyed said they received most of their information on Arabs and/or Muslims from the internet or television; only 2.3% learned about Arabs and/or Muslims at school.

I implore you once again to think about the lives and educational needs of all the students in California and to keep the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) intact, including the proposed Arab American studies curriculum. Think about one of my young students, who looked at me wonderingly with a glow in his face when - after hearing the story I mentioned earlier - said to me, "Ahmed! That is my grandfather's name!"

Thank you for your work for young people of all ages and for being dedicated to broadening their lives and enriching our world with the maintenance of ESMC and Arab American Studies.

Sincerely,
Deni Asnis