

California Department of Education Instructional Quality Commission ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov
Mr. Tony Thurmond, State Superintendent of Public Education superintendent@cde.ca.gov
Ms Linda Darling-Hammond, President of the State Board of Education [email redacted]

Cc: [email redacted]

Re: November 2020 revisions to the draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

The *Sacramento Regional Coalition for Palestinian Rights* reiterates our thanks to the ethnic studies professionals who dedicated time, effort and subject knowledge to create the draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) that was circulated for comment in summer 2019.

The working draft they created was faithful to the content, purpose and approach of ethnic studies as a discipline. And they included an Arab American Studies Course Outline because Arab American studies has been an integral aspect of ethnic studies since its inception more than a half a century ago.

Unfortunately instead of collaborative follow-up work between the 2019 draft ESMC's original authors and others, to edit, refine, and polish that 2019 working product, the California Department of Education/Instructional Quality Commission (CDE/IQC) brought in a different group, which created a new product; one *not* mindful of ethnic studies instructional methodology.

On July 31, 2020, *their* ESMC draft, hundreds of pages long, was released 11 days before the deadline for submitting written public comment for the August 13 IQC meeting. Because Arab American components had reportedly been deleted, concerned educators and others busily reviewed those many pages in preparation for the meeting.

Arab American studies *was* gone. *Arab/Muslim* appeared several times, – reinforcing the erroneous stereotype that the two are interchangeable.

Then, on the afternoon of August 12, CDE announced that there *would be* an Arab American lesson after all.

At the August 13 meeting, the August 12 announcement that there would be an Arab American lesson was repeated several times, each time with the implicitly accusatory disclaimer that it would *not contain anything antisemitic or perceived to be antisemitic*.

But the lesson itself was not yet prepared and would not be for some while.

On November 6, 2020 yet another ESMC iteration was released. Again, hundreds of pages; again, without changes shown side-by-side with original text to facilitate comparison. And lots of new groups were introduced into the curriculum -- Sikhs, Hindus, Mizrahi Jews, and more – but without a single mention of Palestinians.

In the November 6 version, Arab was one among many: Chapter 3, page 21: "...the unique experiences of Southwest Asians (Middle Eastern populations) such as Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Coptic-Christians, Iranians, Mizrahi Jews, Kurds, and Yazidis, South Asians such as, Afghans, Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans, Southeast Asians, such as Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, Indonesians, Malaysians, Myanmarers, Thais, and Vietnamese, East Asians, such as Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese, Filipina/o/x, Pacific Islanders, and U.S. colonialism and imperialism in the Pacific."

Hidden back in the Appendix was an Arab American lesson: "Arab American Stereotypes in Literature, Film and Media Pre- and Post-9-11." It is a thoughtful 1-week lesson – starting way back in the 1920s with an excerpt from a 1925 F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Links and/or reference to: a 1921 Tin Pan Alley song – *Sheik of Araby*; a snippet from a 1921 film – *The Sheik*; a 1929 essay entitled "Deserts of Facts and Fiction;" jumping forward to a trailer for the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*; and even minutes of stand-up comedy by Mo Amer on *The Stephen Colbert Show*.

This MUST to be moved to its rightful place as an Arab American section within Asian American studies.

Moreover, Arab Americans are more than fictional entities in literature and films. The Arab American section needs to include the contributions of real people! Here are some examples of academics, doctors, persons in government, product safety campaigners, comedians, journalists, renowned chefs, authors, etc.: Dr. Edward Said (late), Dr. Jack Shaheen (late), Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, Anthony Shadid (late), Dean Obedallah, Maysoon Zayid, Ralph Nader, Representative Rashida Tlaib, Dr. James Zogby, Susan Abulhawa, Naomi Shihab Nye, Reem Assil, Linda Sarsour, Laila el Haddad, George Mitchell, Paul Anka, Danny Thomas (late), etc.

Since mid-2019, the ESMC process has been tainted by backroom deals, promises made and broken, hyperbole, denial of the realities in the world, false accusations of antisemitism based on a highly contested redefinition of the term to include criticism of Israel, and plain old power politics and other distractions.

California's Arab American students deserve to have their heritage included in ethnic studies curricula and non-Arab American students need to learn that the Arab American community is real people not the sensationalized stereotypes portrayed in the media.

Thank you,
Adeeb Alzanon, Sacramento Regional Coalition for Palestinian Rights, President