

From: Sharif Zakout

Sent: Friday, July 24, 2020 5:19 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Cc: AROC; Superintendent; [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support of ETHS Model Curriculum + Arab-Am Studies

Dear Members of the IQC and Superintendent Tony Thurmond,

My name is Sharif Zakout, and I am an organizer with the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) in the SF-Bay Area. I've worked with the youth in my community for the last 7 years running programs within OUSD and SFUSD Middle schools and High schools. Our organization has been on the frontlines advocating for and supporting our families around immigration, language access, and education equity. I'm writing to you today to urge you all to move forward in support of the current ETHS model curriculum.

The youth we work with were thrilled to hear that they were going to be represented within this Ethnic Studies curriculum. As an Arab who also went through the CA public school system, I could understand this excitement. The youth we work with still experience the very same racism that I dealt with over a decade ago. Very little has changed in regards to the issues they face, yet the level of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism we face has only grown since. Post-9/11, as Arabs and Muslims, we've become more and more hyper-visible within the media, depicted as terrorists, enemies, and/or savages. Like many of our youth, growing up Palestinian meant I invited "controversy" and politics inside and outside the class room without even speaking a single word. In the Trump era, multiple Arab and Muslim communities are being banned, bombed, and occupied simultaneously. At the same time we are completely invisible within any curriculum, only brought up when we were considered a "problem". So when folks learned that there would be an institutional shift in our education that gave our communities control over our own narrative, it was a big deal. Our communities are paying attention.

As both a grad student of Ethnic Studies, and as a Palestinian, it is absolutely ridiculous to claim that our community has no place in this Ethnic Studies curriculum. Ethnic studies is not about multiculturalism, it's about studying and addressing systems of power and oppression. It is the study of liberation and anti-colonialism, led by and for people of color who've been historically marginalized by white supremacy. The inclusion of Arab American studies within Asian Am studies is a continuation of that legacy, calling truth to power and those who wage war globally. As far as our historic contributions, what would Ethnic Studies be without writers like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Joseph Massad, Angela Davis or Jasbir Puar? All of whom produced key readings in Ethnic studies that have expressed devoted international solidarity with Palestine and the Arab struggle against imperialism and colonialism. It was ethnic studies that made me passionate about the links between my people's struggle, and other communities struggling against state oppression globally. Our struggles are interlinked and they cannot be invisibilized.

Superintendent Thurmond, I had the pleasure of meeting you in Berkeley several months back. I spoke to you about the racism our communities felt, our historic

contributions and connections to ethnic studies, and the importance of this curriculum to our families. You assured us that our communities were valued. We are disheartened to learn through public media that you may be in support of erasing our history and culture from the curriculum.

It is still not too late for your Superintendent Thurmond, and the rest of the IQC, to stand in solidarity with communities who are uplifting the spirit and legacy of Ethnic studies. We urge you once again to please support the current ETHS model curriculum and to stand on the right side of history.

Thank you for your time,
Sharif Zakout

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Sharif Zakout
Lead Organizer
Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC)