

From: Spenta Kandawalla
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 10:54 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: Superintendent; [email redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment in Support of ESMC

Dear IQC Members, Superintendent Thurmond, and President Darling-Hammond:

As a public health worker and educator, I strongly support the ESMC including Arab American Studies. As a South Asian from a majority Muslim country growing up I didn't learn anything at school about the region of the world my family and people were from. This created a lot of confusion and dysphoria for me. It instilled a lot of shame in my brown skin, where I came from, and who I was. Shame and confusion lead to mistrust, disconnection, and often harm to self or others. It's a kind of social trauma that cuts off one's wholeness and leaves one fractured in their identity. Learning about one's peoples and their neighbors is critical to instill a sense of dignity and worth in all students, all people. It breeds connection, trust, a sense of purpose and pride.

Why, in the era of 9/11, endless wars in the Middle East, and the ongoing occupation of Palestine (an era of Islamophobia and xenophobia) would you deny Arab American students to learn about who they are? To inherit one sliver of pride and dignity through their public school education, instead of the chronic harassment and racism that they face on a daily basis. It is critical for all students to learn about West Asian American experiences in the ESMC. This includes the history and current struggles in Palestine. Teaching and learning about Palestine is not inherently anti-semitic. It's racist to think it is.

I grew up not learning in school about my own people. But that was in the midwest. I can't imagine a state like California would deny any of its students of color the human right to learn about who they are and have their peers learn about them as well.

I hope you will stand on the right side of history and fully support Arab American Studies being included in the ESMC for the well-being and survival of all students.

Thank you,
Spenta Kandawalla