

**From:** Fadi Saba  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 8, 2020 1:58 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** Superintendent; [emails redacted]  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Curriculum public comment

July 8, 2020

Dear members of the IQC and State Superintendent Thurmond,

My name is Fadi Saba, a proud California Arab-American teacher, union leader and peace and justice activist. I'm president of our CTA Chapter, Luther Burbank Education Association, which has taught me the importance of solidarity between groups, and putting ourselves in the shoes of other communities. I hold a single subject social studies and multiple subject credentials and have taught in high school, middle school, and now elementary school. In the upper grades, I have been a US and World History teacher. In 5th grade, I teach math and US history. Hence, I understand and know the history curriculum in California; and I recognize how ethnic minorities end up with the 'short end of the stick'. I write you my personal experiences in California's public school to impress upon you to ***vote for the Ethnic Studies Curriculum as it was originally presented.***

For these reasons, I was elated that the State is interested in an ethnic studies curriculum that will encourage teachers to teach about minority ethnic experiences in California. This is critical. As an Arab American student, I was bullied and misunderstood all the way through 12th grade. In 1978, I entered 6th grade upon my family's immigration to the US in 1978. That school year, most of my peers thought **my father 'owned oil wells'** and they hoped he would give them one (remember that this follows the Arab oil embargo in the 1970's). Others thought, since I was born in Africa, **I had lived in trees in the jungle** and we didn't have automobiles. Unacceptable stereotypes. Stereotypes that later, if not dealt with, become racist thoughts, and possibly actions.

The following year, after the 1979 Iranian revolution and the **US hostage crisis, it was 'all my fault'**. I was the reason for Americans held hostage. I was attacked and bullied for being Arab-American. This continued through high school. I was **the terrorist**. I was the **reason for US misery**. I was the reason for the **US marines were attacked** in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1980's. I was the reason for all **attacks on US interests**. And why? Because I'm an Arab-American? Or is it because my peers had not a clue about my culture, history, experiences? The answer is both. They only knew I'm from that part of the world, but knew nothing about my culture, history, or experiences (born a refugee, for example). As a result of their ignorance, my peers saw me as inferior to them. That **I was responsible for every American misery in the Middle East**. And very few teachers were supportive of me, which adds salt to the wound. School was not a safe and supportive experience.

In high school, **only two teachers**, Mr. Bick and Ms. Pedersen, **were supportive and helpful**. Ms. Pedersen is a Latina, and understood what it's like to be a target by the dominant culture/community (caucasian). Mr. Bick was a caucasian outlier. I say this because not a single other white teacher showed interest in my history and experiences. None. Rather, they added to the racist attitude toward me as a Palestinian/Arab-American. We now call this implicit bias. In middle school, there was one social studies teacher and an African-American academic counselor who supported me.

As you can imagine, I felt that my Arabness was a negative. I know of others who **refused to keep their language**. Some **changed their name**. As for me, **I felt that I could not speak up** and defend myself in class; nor did I participate in class like others. **Kids were** already **initiating fights** with me specifically **because of my background**. If students were given the chance to understand how and why Palestinians/Arabs are acting and reacting a certain way, they may not behave in such a way toward other students. Maybe, they will find understanding and be supportive. Maybe, my daughter won't feel as I did. Won't get into fights as I did. Won't feel isolated and alone as I did. Maybe she will grow up proud of her heritage as an Arab-Mexican-American.

**Ethnic studies** classes and lessons at schools show a **raise in confidence in minority students**. And I wrote you my experience because **I want you to support and vote** for the Ethnic Studies Curriculum **as originally presented**. That version allows teachers to teach about the Palestinian/Arab-American experience. The importance of US intervention in the world and the Middle East has real, and negative, consequences on our Arab-American (and Arab looking stereotyped Sikhs, etc.) students. Understanding oppression on a global scale will help the 'different' Americans. **Arab-Americans need no less than African Americans and the Latinx community**. The grape boycott by UFW is an important part of the Latinx community in our state. So is Palestinian boycott movement. **Americans need to understand our experience to appreciate us as equals**; and as ones to respect. We all bring a beautiful culture and heritage to California. Let's celebrate it rather than suppress it.

If you get rid of the parts on BDS and other political sections in the Arab-American part of the Ethnic Studies Curriculum, you are aligning yourself with the bullies. You are supporting the continued fights against kids like me. You would be OK with students feeling alone, isolated, and eating their lunch in the bathroom so as to reduce the chance of being bullied, picked on, and ganged up on. If you are willing to have kids feel this way, go ahead and get rid of these sections. If however you feel that all children deserve a pro-social, positive and safe place to learn, then **you must keep the original** Ethnic Studies Curriculum as presented in 2019.

I look forward to your support of the Arab-American portion of the Ethnic Studies Curriculum as was originally proposed. **Political lobbying by groups is like the bullying I was the victim of**. Don't let it get to you. Stand strong and support the original proposal.

Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me by email (this is being sent by email, so you should have it).

Yours for safer schools,

Fadi Saba

Teacher

President, Luther Burbank Education Association/CTA/NEA