

**From:** Steve Kanofsky  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 6:47 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** Superintendent; Shanine Coats  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] SURJ Bay Area OPPOSITION to current revisions of CA ESMC

SURJ Bay Area

January 18, 2021

Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent, CA Department of Education  
1430 N. Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SURJ Bay Area OPPOSITION to current revisions of CA ESMC**

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

We in SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice, Bay Area chapter) support the campaign of the Coalition to Save Arab-American Studies to restore lessons about the lives and histories of Arab people in the U.S. to the Asian-American section of the DOE's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The new U.S. administration, we learned, has vowed to rescind the Muslim ban and to restore human rights of Arab-Americans. But the California Department of Education, in its final draft of the ESMC, has moved to *edit out* their lives and stories. It relegates Arab-American history to an "interethnic bridge-building" citation in the *appendix*, where students will never find it. The liberatory anti-racist lessons developed by Arab American educators don't even appear in the appendix. Structural definitions of "racism" critical to understanding this system have been relegated to footnotes that few will read.

If the DOE lets this awful version stand, Arab-Americans, like so many peoples in the tapestry of U.S. life, will be denied their reality, their personhood. Such censorship, bias and miseducation has historically made too many in our land invisible. Students in California, and around the U.S., will be left with pop-culture caricatures and ignorance of Arabic peoples instead of acceptance and knowledge. That cannot be an acceptable educational outcome.

Just last August California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced that Arab-American studies would be an integral part of the Asian-American Studies curriculum. What happened to change that? Despite the intense efforts of thousands of educators and activists across the state to include Arab-American studies, the representation of Arab-Americans in the latest ESMC iteration has *worsened*. The power to decide about educational content must not be ceded to politicians and biased agents.

SURJ is an anti-racist organization with chapters across California and over 150 in the

U.S., with thousands of members and hundreds of thousands of allies. Our mission is to mobilize white people into multiracial movements for racial justice, in partnership with organizations led by people of color. Our work against racism drives us to oppose the well-funded campaign to minimize Arab-American voices, especially those of Palestinians, in the ESMC. The DOE must hold itself to more respectful standards. We join other activists demanding respectful, inclusive lessons in Arab-American studies, on a par with other ethnicities, for California's students.

We in SURJ, whether Jews, non-Jews or people of color, urge the DOE to demonstrate that Californians have learned some positive lessons of the Black Lives Matter movement: invisibility and misunderstanding makes ethnic minorities vulnerable to violence, immiseration and oppression. **Especially after the events of last week in D.C., and the uprisings over this last year, it would be outrageous for the country's largest education system to impede schools from teaching about race and power, and exploring the strategies of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities fighting for change.**

**Restore Arab-American Studies!**

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,  
SURJ Bay Area