

**From:** Sami Kitmitto

**Sent:** Sunday, July 19, 2020 9:41 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Cc:** Superintendent; [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Please support the ESMC, including Arab American studies AS IS

Dear members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

I am writing to urge you to 1) support the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, 2) with Arab American Studies included, and 3) with Arab American studies included AS IS.

First, I'm sure you are aware of the importance of ethnic studies for academic as well as social and emotional outcomes. It is not just practitioners and community groups who can testify to power of Ethnic Studies, but the recent Dee and Penner (2017) study provides strong empirical evidence as well. In the current moment of the George Floyd protests and the xenophobia levied at Asian Americans as part of the COVID19 pandemic, the need to challenge systemic racism in all spheres could not be more urgent. Ethnic studies is crucial for starting to address systemic racism and bias in education.

Second, the inclusion of Arab American studies is similarly urgent at this time due to the intensity of Islamophobia at this time. For the past 20 years at least, there has been intensive efforts to falsely paint Arabs and Islam as an "existential threat" to the United States. This false fear has been used to justify ongoing US wars, militarization, and support for repressive regimes in the Middle East as well as justification for rewriting the laws on torture post-911. The brunt of these attacks is severely felt by Arab American youth in schools as documented in two successive reports by the Arab Youth Organization (AYO 2012, 2020). As much as any group impacted by systemic racism in the US, Arab American youth need to be included in the Ethnic Studies curriculum.

Third, I am aware that you are likely hearing right wing opposition to the curriculum and the inclusion of Arab American studies in whole or in part. I urge you to keep the curriculum AS IS. Let me try an analogy... have you ever heard it claimed in the media or by right wing pundits that "Black Lives Matter is a terrorist organization" or that the call for "Black Lives Matter is racist"? I suspect that you can easily see through the lies behind those false claims and I urge you to also see through the similar (and similarly false) claims being made about the Arab American studies curriculum. Those in opposition claim that the inclusion of Arab American studies and, in particular, aspects of the curriculum that talk about the history of Palestine and Palestinians is antisemitic, exclusionary, and/or racist. Yet there is no basis for those claims if you look at the curriculum. Additionally, there are many social justice organizations, including Jewish organizations, who have verified that these claims are false (see the statements of support: <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/statements-of-support/>). Those in opposition to Arab American studies and discussions of Palestine do not want their power and privilege challenged in any way and such outrageous claims are their usual tactic.

Finally, I want to point out that the opposition to the Arab Studies curriculum should in fact be proof to you of its need and importance. Right wing forces are asking you to silence Arab and Palestinian voices from telling their history. That sort of racism is the motivating factor behind the creation of Ethnic Studies and should be all the proof you need to keep Arab American studies in the ESMC and to keep it as is.

Thank you,  
Sami Kitmitto

#### References

- Arab Youth Organization. (2012). *Teaching Understanding & Representing Arabs Throughout History T.U.R.A.T.H.* Arab Resource and Organizing Center: San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from: <http://araborganizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/TURATH-Report-.pdf>
- Arab Youth Organization. (2020). *TURATH: Teaching Understanding & Representing Arabs Throughout History*. Arab Resource and Organizing Center: San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from: [http://araborganizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TURATH\\_ArabYouthinSchools\\_2020.pdf](http://araborganizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TURATH_ArabYouthinSchools_2020.pdf)
- Dee, T., & Penner, E. (2017). The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 127-166.