



5 Elements Youth Program
1111 Junipero Serra Boulevard
San Francisco, CA 94132
www.5elementssf.org

1/19/2021

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

Re: 5 Elements Youth Program OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of **5 Elements Youth Program**, I am writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not live up to the values, principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.” We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

As an organization, we advocate for culturally relevant, critical pedagogy in our public education system as a critical intervention that addresses academic disparities for low-income youth of color. We believe that youth should be provided with spaces for critical thinking to properly identify, reflect, critique, and take actions that challenge systemic racism and oppression at internalized, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Our co-founders have been directly inspired by the leadership of previous young people in social movements across the Bay Area. This includes the visionary leadership of students in our city that led to the [historic 1968 Third World Liberation Front student strike at San Francisco State University](#), which led to the establishment of the first [College of Ethnic Studies](#), and which set the foundation decades later to win the [institutionalization of Ethnic Studies courses for 9th graders in SFUSD](#).

We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied.

We echo and uplift the demands of the **Save Arab American Studies Coalition**, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators:

- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.

- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the **true** spirit of the original 1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes that led to Ethnic Studies as a discipline. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juana Teresa Tello". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Juana" being the most prominent.

Juana Teresa Tello, MPH

(She/Her/Ella)

5 Elements, Co-Founder & Executive Director

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