

**From:** Nina Shoman

**Sent:** Friday, November 13, 2020 10:30 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>; [emails redacted]

**Cc:** [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Concern over Ethnic Studies

**Dear Mr. Thurmond, Chair Darling-Hammond and Members of the IQC Commission,**

**I am writing with great concern over the recent handing the Ethnic Studies curriculum in California. I share the same concerns as thousands of other educators, parents, students and advocates for equity and inclusion in our schools.**

- We know, from the demands for racial justice sweeping this county, that it is offensive and dangerous to shunt the histories and perspectives of people of color to the sidelines. These revisions are tone-deaf to the political moment we are living in.
- Our children are once again being left to fend for themselves in an increasingly racialized and polarized political climate. California should be a sanctuary, not a place of danger for our students and their families.
- Young people in particular face the consequences of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. Arab and Muslim youth are simultaneously invisibilized and targeted.
- For too long, Arab youth have learned little about their history besides offensive and racist images and stereotypes. Arab-American studies curriculum provides a critical intervention to these stereotypes in K-12 education.
- Pro-Israel interest groups should not define antisemitism. Definitions that name criticism of Israel as antisemitic are opposed by many Jewish organizations, both within the United States and internationally. These definitions violate our constitutional right to free speech because their application censors virtually all criticism of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian human rights and equality. These definitions also downplay the main source of antisemitism in the United States, which is white nationalism.

Suggestions for a more equitable approach :

- Include the Arab American lesson plan submitted to the California Department of Education by members of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) advisory committee.
- Re-insert Arab American studies in its rightful place—within Asian American studies.
- Align all lesson plans to the guiding principles of ethnic studies, which are anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory.
- Reject debunked definitions of antisemitism that equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nina Shoman-Dajani