

Dear California Instructional Quality Commission and State Board of Education,

For over 50 years, communities of color have struggled to institutionalize Ethnic Studies in California. Students and faculty have advocated for the inclusion of Ethnic Studies as a legitimate academic discipline, even through strikes and hunger strikes when necessary. In fact, where Ethnic Studies has been taught, it has shown high levels of efficacy, and even narrowed and closed the achievement gap/opportunity gap. The expert Ethnic Studies (ES) educators, appointed by you, representing every region of the state, came together for this purposeful work. We urge you not to give in to right-wing racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, anti-progressivism, and anti-intellectualism that does not respect the language and framings of the field, nor students of color as human beings. Human beings have deep ancestral roots and deserve an opportunity to study them — to better understand the present, and how to create a brighter, more just and equitable California, US, and world for future generations.

According to the California Department of Education, this is not meant to be “a complete classroom curriculum or instructional materials; it is intended as a resource, a guidance document.” It serves well as that, to be community responsive, for districts and teachers to develop their own complete classroom curriculum and instructional materials. This was by design by the CDE.

Four racialized groups of students of color and their allies, gave birth to Ethnic Studies in California in the 1960's, establishing: African American Studies, Native American Studies, Latinx/Xicanx Studies, and Asian American Studies. Each continues to ground the field today, and these are the four core perspectives presented within this model curriculum — as they should be. Each also has many distinctions and different viewpoints within them when examined closely. And each has subfields or associated fields with distinct experiences; Pacific Islander Studies, Central American Studies, and Arab American Studies course outlines are also offered as examples in the curriculum. Further, Gender justice and LGBTQ perspectives are present, also situated in the marginalization experienced by people of color. Each of these is associated with the field/discipline of Ethnic Studies today. If you look at higher education ES programs across the state, you will find this to be the case. The curricular guide has an obligation to respect Ethnic Studies as a field, its research, its multiple perspectives, its pedagogical approach, its legacy, and to allow educators to adapt it at the district level. It currently accomplishes this well — please do not let the heavily funded right-wing lobbies, who are against this POC centeredness, distract you from moving forward during this vital and decisive moment.

Students of color are the overwhelming majority of students in California, and it is those students whose stories have been absent, neglected, and ignored, for generations. This model curriculum honors their experiences. Communities of color in California deserve educational justice, and this is a key part of it. Further, authentic Ethnic Studies has academic and social value for all of California's students. We humbly remind you that Ethnic Studies has been demonstrated to increase: a) student attendance, b) student engagement with school, c) socioemotional sense of belonging, d) GPA across

disciplines, e) high school graduation rates, f) college-going rates, and even, g) high stakes standardized test scores. It is evident that Ethnic Studies works when done correctly. This means it must be respected as the academic field it is, backed by effective pedagogy (which professional development and district support will be needed for, as it is in all disciplines), and not diluted. The teacher leaders of California you selected to spearhead this project, including from districts that already have demonstrated these transformative results, helped produce this curricular guide, and did it well within the time and space allotted.

If you feel the need to make any imperative edits based on reasonable public comments (such as including anti-Semitism alongside Islamophobia in these dire times of white supremacy and tragic violence), please do so. Also, please remember that any additions should honor the voices of color, in this case, the four pan-ethnic racialized groups originally intended in the curriculum. Rest assured, if districts wish to amend the framework to address other groups, they can. It is our hope that any changes will honor the discipline of Ethnic Studies and that the model curriculum will not turn into a superficial multicultural class in American History, which is already possible within the existing K-12 course of study. Please respect the expertise, labor, and guidance of Ethnic Studies educator leaders that you, the IQC/SBE, appointed and gave three meetings to produce this work. Please make any necessary adjustments and move this curriculum forward.

The next era is here, and with our current national political climate, we cannot wait any longer, students need to learn more empathy and the perspectives of marginalized people of color. Students need at least one Ethnic Studies course in 12 years of an otherwise largely Eurocentric education, and this model curriculum serves as the basis for that. Please proceed and do not move backward in time; our communities, our state, our country, and our world cannot afford to wait any longer.

Sincerely,
Ashley Villanueva