

From: Julie Roberts

Sent: Friday, July 3, 2020 6:10 PM

To: Ethnic Studies; Superintendent; [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Ethnic studies whole

Dear State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and CDE President Linda Darling-Hammond,

I'm a Jewish parent of children attending a school with a high percentage of Arab students, and I'm writing to ask you to keep Arab American studies in the California ethnic studies curriculum. This is important to my children so they have a complete and accurate curriculum, and also for the Arab families which my children attend school with. Ethnic studies is a key strategy for student achievement -- when students don't see their histories and stories reflected in their curriculum it creates barriers to engagement. Leaving Arab American studies out of ethnic studies would leave my children with a knowledge gap and leave them vulnerable to racist anti-Arab stereotypes that are common in our culture.

CA data collection makes Arab families invisible in our school data -- there is no category for Middle Eastern or Arab -- so they are invisibilized in the "white" racial category. In lighter moments, families joke about the harassment they experience even in the streets of "progressive" San Francisco and wonder where their white privilege is when their kids are called "terrorist." In more heavy moments, people have gotten emotional and shared that they feel like they can't leave the neighborhood safely.

During the Muslim Ban, I was doing yard duty and a 4th grader told me how things were hard for her right now because her aunt wasn't able to come back to the US. It was heartwrenching for me to hear this story, and the way Anti-Arab racism cut through this child's family. At the same time, Arab children and families in our school did not take this oppression without resisting -- they heroically shut down SFO and got people detained at the airport released. Ethnic studies means Arab American educators telling the full stories of Arab communities. It can't be implemented without Arab American scholars and ethnic studies practitioners.

As a Jewish person, I feel it is important to have education about Palestine which includes Palestinian voices in our curriculum. It is not anti-Semitic to teach facts about Israel and its treatment of the Palestinian people. It took me too long to become educated about the experience of Palestinian families partly because so much of our culture defers to pro-Israel advocates whose priorities do not reflect my Jewish values. This would be like deciding not to teach about South Africa under apartheid because the white minority there didn't want us to listen to the experiences of Nelson Mandela and other organizers.

I urge you to keep ethnic studies whole, which means including Arab American studies intact, and developing curriculum with Arab American and Ethnic Studies educators. It's the right thing for Arab American students, and for my children.

Best,

Julie

My pronouns are: she/her/hers