

August 11, 2020

Instructional Quality Commission

California Department of Education

1430 N Street, Suite 5111

Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Education, Instructional Quality Commission Mr. Tony Thurmond,
State Superintendent of Public Education Ms Linda Darling-Hammond, President of the State
Board of Education

Re: 2020 revised draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

As AB 1460 succinctly states: “Ethnic studies are an interdisciplinary and comparative study of race and ethnicity with special focus on four historically defined racialized core groups: Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latina and Latino Americans.” Thanks to the Ethnic Studies professionals who dedicated many months of serious, thorough, and caring work to create an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) that was circulated for comment in May-August 2019.

The 2019 draft addressed each of the four Ethnic Studies populations individually. And sample activities were included which encouraged students to engage. To learn to disagree constructively and respectfully. To do the necessary research to distinguish facts from “alternative facts.” And to recognize that not all “facts” are equally legitimate.

In the section on Arab Americans there was a list of important names – ranging from Naji Daifullah, a Yemeni involved in the National Farm Workers Movement, to Edward Wadie Said, one of the most important public intellectuals of the second half of the 20th century, to Representative Rashida Tlaib, one of the two Muslim American women to be elected to the United States House of Representatives.

Unfortunately, the 2020 draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum deleted the Arab American Studies component of the 2019 draft. For at least the last two decades Arab American Studies has been included under Asian American Studies in the ESMC. In the 2020 document Populations Displaced by War and Genocide (Attachment 6, Line 835 et seq.) mentions “Syrian, Afghani and other refugees from the Middle East to the United States as a result of the recent wars in that region.” There is no mention of Palestinians among those Syrian refugees. No mention of Iraqis. No clarification that Afghanis are not Arabs.

Also, Attachment 8, Lines 8336-8354, “Arab/Muslim Americans” lumps together Arab and Muslim. Not only are Arabs of various religions, including Christianity and Judaism, it is implied that Arabs/Muslims relate differently to religion than individuals of other religions. And the suggested activity could actually serve to reinforce negative stereotypes about Arab and Muslims that students may already have. They are asked to make a “digital ‘myth busters’ handbook with the “‘Top Five’ ... most prevalent stereotypes ... related to Islam”

The public school curriculum is one of the key tools in fashioning a national narrative and for the last five decades Ethnic Studies educators and practitioners, like the group that wrote the 2019 draft, have

endeavored -- often against formidable opposition -- to ensure that the narrative taught to students is appreciative of the experiences, sacrifices, and contributions of persons of color who created the mosaic that is the United States of America.

In the United States Palestinian-Americans suffer from silencing. When their story is discussed at all, it is presented by non-Palestinians. As a member of the United States House of Representatives recently acknowledged, Palestinian voices are excluded from the conversation and he urged that such silencing cease and that Palestinian voices be listened to. Unfortunately, not only Palestinian American voices, but Arab American voices are pretty much excluded from the 2020 draft ESMC.

Attachment 6, Lines 688-690 of the 2020 draft, asserts that Arab Americans "... have been historically marginalized and under studied within the field..." The 2020 draft ESMC continues that marginalization by excising the Arab American Studies section.

Sincerely,

Gloria Fearn

Stockton, CA