



To the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Department of Education,

We, the North America branch of the Palestinian Youth Movement, call on you to reinstate Arab American Studies and Palestine in the statewide model ethnic studies curriculum. The relegation of Arab American Studies to the appendix of the model ethnic studies curriculum is unacceptable and reflects a blatant sidelining of histories crucial to an understanding of racial justice. These revisions are completely tone-deaf to the political moment we are living in, during which demands for racial justice are sweeping the country. We urge the IQC to reinstate the Arab-American Studies lesson plan submitted by members of the original ethnic studies advisory committee, respecting the powerful scholarship that shaped the curriculum and the critical need for this area of study.

As a youth organization with multiple chapters across California and North America that works to empower new generations of Palestinian and Arab youth to take pride in and learn about their heritages, we believe it is crucial to fight for educational programming that uplifts Arab American stories alongside other community narratives of the fight against historical and ongoing forms of oppression and racism. For too long, Arab youth have only learned about offensive and racist stereotypes about Arab communities, and have experienced a severe lack of education regarding their history. According to the Turath 2020 Report conducted by teenagers part of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center, only 2.3% of students surveyed learned about Arabs and/or Muslims in school. Reinstating the Arab-American Studies lesson plan would provide a crucial intervention to these stereotypes in K-12 education, and would respond to the educational needs of Arab students in California.

Furthermore, the equating of anti-semitism with criticism of Israel by lobbyist groups represents a grave threat to academic freedom and the fight for Palestinian freedom and equality. It sets a precedent for other states' legislature and encourages the silencing of educators around the nation. Pro-Israel interest groups should not define anti-semitism. Definitions that name criticism of Israel as anti-semitic are opposed by many Jewish organizations, both within the United States and internationally. They downplay the main source of anti-semitism in the United States, which is white nationalism. We urge

the IQC to reject debunked definitions of anti-semitism that equate criticism of Israel with anti-semitism.

We further note that education in this country has frequently served as an arm of racist oppression and dispossession in this country. From boarding schools dedicated to furthering the cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples, to universities that directly profited from slavery, advanced medical knowledge via unethical experimentation upon the bodies of enslaved peoples, and realized their territorial integrity via ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples, schools and universities have long been a site of power and discipline rather than a magical sphere safely removed from the political realities of this country. Ethnic Studies emerged as an important attempt to counteract this, to show that education itself is political, and thus to redirect the project of education to scrutinizing the workings of power and counteracting erasures and exclusions of all that have been its victims.

For these reasons, we urge the IQC to re-insert Arab American studies in its rightful place-within Asian American Studies. We urge the IQC to align all lesson plans to the guiding principles of ethnic studies, which are anti-racist, decolonial, and liberatory. Doing anything otherwise, including relegating Arab American Studies to the appendix of the model ethnic studies curriculum, would be to spit on the face of the legacy of Ethnic Studies. It would be a searing betrayal of everything that activists, educators, and intellectuals of various backgrounds fought for for so long. Having our communities' histories and stories told will not right every wrong that has been done, but it would be a powerful first step towards challenging the erasure of our voices and the state-sanctioned repression that we have long faced due to belligerent US foreign policy.

- The Palestinian Youth Movement