

From: Zoha Khalili

Sent: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 2:42 PM

To: Ethnic Studies; Superintendent; Shanine Coats

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Palestine Legal OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond:

I am writing on behalf of Palestine Legal to oppose the current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) and the censorship campaign that shaped the current draft.

Our curricula should be built by educators. They should not be formed via a politically motivated top-down revisionist campaign that contradicts the values, principles and pedagogy of ethnic studies. The ethnic studies educators who developed the original draft dared to include Palestinian Americans, their activism and their culture as topics worthy of study. Now they have been sidelined while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in revisions to the curriculum.

References to Palestine activism within the US have been eliminated and Arab American studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander studies and instead relegated to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix” that includes sanitized references that treat Arabs as objects rather than agents of change.

As an organization dedicated to protecting the civil and constitutional rights of people in the United States who speak out for Palestinian freedom, Palestine Legal recognizes the trajectory of the ESMC as a familiar pattern. Over the past seven years, we have responded to over 1,500 incidents of [repression of U.S. based activists, students and educators](#), who have been targeted because of their support for Palestinian rights. Rather than debating facts or addressing the substance of arguments, anti-Palestinian groups often try to silence and punish those who critically analyze Israel's actions and policies toward Palestinians. Efforts to remove Palestine from the ESMC fall in line with this trend.

The state's seeming capitulation to this censorship campaign is sending a dangerous message to educators that even within the liberatory framework of ethnic studies, California educators must adhere to the U.S. foreign policy line when it comes to Palestine. What's next? A campaign that would have California follow in the Trump administration's footsteps and seek to curb anti-racism training as a form of “anti-American propaganda”?

It is not too late to change the message that California is sending and to prioritize educators and experts over would-be censors.

We echo and uplift the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition to:

- Re-empower experts in the field of ethnic studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of ethnic studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the spirit of the original

1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes that led to ethnic studies as a discipline. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Zoha Khalili
Staff Attorney
Palestine Legal