

August 10, 2020

Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

The undersigned members of the **Armenian American School Board Association** **strongly urge you to hear the voices of Armenian American Californians and reflect our histories and experiences in the proposed California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum in a meaningful way.**

We write to you today to express our firm support of

- the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum,
- the appeals of **Asian American** scholars to include **West Asian American Studies in the Model Curriculum.**
- and the inclusion of **Armenian American** studies within the **West Asian American Studies** portion of the Model Curriculum.

In this era, Ethnic Studies must include West Asian American Studies to shine a light on those communities impacted by the Muslim travel ban, xenophobia, racism and state violence.

Armenian Americans have had a long history of immigration to the United States and experiences of racialization and marginalization, similar to many other immigrant communities and ethnic and linguistic minorities. From the early immigration of Armenians to the Central Valley as refugees of the genocide of the Ottoman Empire, to the emigration of Armenians from the former Soviet Union, the Republic of Armenia, Iran and war-torn countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, Armenians make up a significant ethnic group in California. In fact, scholars estimate that Armenian Americans represent up to 500,000 people in California, with the greatest population of Armenians outside of Armenia residing in California.

The Armenian-American experience in the United States has grappled with issues of refugeehood, erasure, immigration, and marginalization. Many Armenian American students are immigrants, children of immigrants and English Language Learners. They have been subjected to racialized and discriminatory practices and what Dr. Angela

Valenzuela calls “subtractive schooling” - assimilation through deculturalization. Most of us Armenian American school board members have had these same experiences when we ourselves were students in California public schools.

These experiences are beyond the Genocide Education that is currently referenced in the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft. Our long history within the United States, our racialized experiences, our significant contributions to the American social and cultural fabric, as well as our community’s resistance to state oppression in coalition with other communities of color has been left out of the model curriculum. It is imperative that Armenian American students see themselves as part of the larger California community and see their experiences reflected in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

As educators and school board members, we understand the importance of having students see themselves, their histories and identities reflected and affirmed in the curriculum. Also, we believe that it is important for all students to learn about the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups to build tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding. **We strongly support the Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum but we insist that the Armenian American experience be included in a meaningful way within the West Asian American Studies category. Our scholars who work in the field of Ethnic Studies should be consulted in the writing of the curriculum that represents our communities.**

We would be glad to provide you with the names and contact information of scholars who are working in this field and who would be willing to help write the Armenian American portion of the Model Curriculum.

Don’t cut us out or represent us in a reductionist manner. We urge you to hear community voices calling for the inclusion of West Asian American experiences within Ethnic Studies, and the necessity of Armenian American histories within that experience.

We thank you in advance for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Dr. Suzie Abajian
School Board Member
South Pasadena Unified School District

Dr. Armond Aghakhanian
School Board President
Burbank Unified School District

Dr. Armina Gharpetian
School Board President
Glendale Unified School District

Shant Sahakian
School Board Vice President
Glendale Unified School District

Nayiri Nahabedian
School Board Member
Glendale Unified School District

Gregory S. Krikorian
School Board Member
Glendale Unified School District

Kaitzer Puglia
School Board Member
La Canada Unified School District

Vruyr (Roy) Boulghourjian
School Board Member
Pasadena Unified School District

Paul Naccachian
Former School Board Member
Azusa Unified School District

www.armenianschoolboard.org