

From: Sharif Zakout

Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 11:25 AM

To: Ethnic Studies; Superintendent;

Cc: AROC

Subject: [EXTERNAL] This is NOT Ethnic Studies - Stand with Communities!

Dear Members of the IQC and Superintendent Tony Thurmond,

My name is Sharif Zakout, and I am an organizer with the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) in the SF-Bay Area. I've worked with the youth in my community for the last 7 years running programs within OUSD and SFUSD Middle schools and High schools. Our organization has been on the frontlines advocating for and supporting our families around immigration, language access, and education equity. I'm writing to you today to urge you all to place Arab Am studies where it rightfully belongs, within Asian Am studies, with the inclusion of Palestine.

The youth we work with were initially very excited that they were going to be represented within the Ethnic Studies curriculum. However after Superintendent Thurmond's press conference, they became frustrated. It felt like an extension of the experiences they've faced in school being completely invisibilized within education. Additionally, they were outraged to see that all mention of Palestinians (the largest Palestinian population is in CA) were completely erased. It's absolutely unacceptable for the CDE to backtrack on its promise and place our community within the appendix and to take lead from Israeli interests groups on curriculum that would directly impact and speak to our communities.

I want to be clear that this move from the CDE is absolutely **anti-Arab & Islamophobic**. Refusing to take lead from our community when it comes to curriculum about our own community is unacceptable. To completely erase an entire ethnic group, Palestinians, falls in line with practices of colonialism and white supremacy which are counter to the principles of ethnic studies. To not include migration patterns of our community because of the implications of naming the US war machine, is taking a political stance in favor of war, racism, and erasure. Including a definition of anti-semitism that equates criticism of Israel with it, not only is problematic, but inherently silences all Palestinian voices and all voices (Jewish and non-Jewish) that are critical of colonialism. Lastly, partnering with anti-Arab and Islamophobic organizations like the Simon Weisenthal Center (whose founder actively supported and held mega fundraisers for Trump) and the ADL (which has a long history of attacking social justice movements) is not only insulting to our community, but to all communities who hold the struggle for justice in high

regard.

As both a grad student of Ethnic Studies, and as a Palestinian, it is absolutely frustrating to see the CDE break it's promise in including Arab Studies within Asian Am studies. Ethnic studies is not about multiculturalism, it's about studying and addressing systems of power and oppression. It is the study of liberation and anti-colonialism, led by and for people of color who've been historically marginalized by white supremacy. The inclusion of Arab American studies within Asian Am studies is a continuation of that legacy, calling truth to power and those who wage war globally. As far as our historic contributions, what would Ethnic Studies be without writers like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Joseph Massad, Angela Davis or Jasbir Puar? All of whom produced key readings in Ethnic studies that have expressed devoted international solidarity with Palestine and the Arab struggle against imperialism and colonialism. It was ethnic studies that made me passionate about the links between my people's struggle, and other communities struggling against state oppression globally. Our struggles are interlinked and they cannot be invisibilized. Ethnic studies is meant to politicize and empower youth, that's literally the whole point. To name otherwise is a slap in the face to all the organizers and hard work that went into this struggle. **This is not an "all lives matter" curriculum!**

Superintendent Thurmond, I had the pleasure of meeting you in Berkeley early this year. I spoke to you about the racism our communities felt, our historic contributions and connections to ethnic studies, and the importance of this curriculum to our families. You assured us that our communities were valued. We are disheartened to learn through public media that you are pushing to erase our history and culture from the curriculum.

It is still not too late for your Superintendent Thurmond, and the rest of the IQC, to stand in solidarity with communities who are uplifting the spirit and legacy of Ethnic studies. We urge you once again to please support the current ETHS model curriculum and to stand on the right side of history. I urge you to check out this [website on the ADL](#) and their history of racist practices.

Thank you for your time,
Sharif Zakout