

From: Palestine Solidarity Committee
Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2021 4:06 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: Superintendent; Shanine Coats
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Palestine Solidarity Committee OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC



January 21, 2021

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent, CA Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: The Palestine Solidarity Committee at UT Austin OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of The Palestine Solidarity Committee at UT Austin, I am writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not live up to the values, principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies to an "interethnic bridge-building appendix." We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

As an organization that prioritizes the needs of our community, Ethnic Studies is foundational to the education of our youth.

The Palestine Solidarity Committee is a community organization dedicated to fighting for Palestinian liberation and the right of return, upholding the call for BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions), uplifting Palestinian leadership, coalition building, solidarity, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, and anti-sexism.

As Palestinian human rights advocates, Ethnic Studies is important to us because it is a pedagogy that has always centered progressive causes. Knowing/ recognizing the intersectionality of our struggles, it is crucial that Arab American and Pacific Islander histories do not get sidelined. Ethnic Studies has always garnered a certain sense of belonging for minority

students. This representation is fundamental to the overall academic success of students because it allows us to see ourselves in the material we are studying.

Pacific Islander and Arab American histories of struggle help us navigate how we define self-determination and sovereignty to give us a transformative way of thinking about the marginalization of our communities. The marginalization of Pacific Islander and Arab American communities is tied to our complex relationships with white supremacy in the US, which is why **when Ethnic Studies curriculums accurately reflect our histories, it's liberating for all of us.**

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- In a time of growing anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism, recognizing Arab experience, history and culture as part of the broader ethnic studies curriculum is a great advancement towards social justice, a pillar of ethnic studies.
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- *Teaching this history will help create a bridge between migrant communities and celebrate*
- *a rich history of a growing population.*
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We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied.

We are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators:

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- 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.
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- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
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- 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.
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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,

The Palestine Solidarity Committee - Austin, Tx