



Advancing social justice by engaging Pacific Islanders in
culture-centered advocacy, leadership development, and research.

January 19th, 2021

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

Re: EPIC OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC), 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. EPIC is a national organization based on Tongva Territory in Los Angeles that advances social justice by engaging Pacific Islanders in culture-centered advocacy, leadership development, and research. Though we applaud the efforts made to include Pacific Islander Studies curriculum, the lessons gleaned from Arab American Studies have informed our community’s understanding of ourselves in diaspora. The marginalization of Arab American Studies contradicts the fundamental purpose of Ethnic Studies.

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:

- 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.



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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tavae Samuelu'.

Tavae Samuelu
Executive Director
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)