

**ADDRESS**

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January 19, 2021

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

Re: ARISE High School OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

My name is Hannah Nguyen and I am the Ethnic Studies Department Lead and 9th Grade Teacher Lead at ARISE High School in East Oakland, CA. I am also a recipient of the LIGHT Awards and currently serve on a council of Ethnic Studies educators across the Bay Area to develop Ethnic Studies curricular materials and resources in partnership with Facing History and Ourselves.

On behalf of the Ethnic Studies Department at ARISE High School, 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", while any mention of Palestine has been erased. We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix and further silenced.

At ARISE High School, our mission is to empower our students with the knowledge, skills, and agency to become highly educated, humanizing, critically conscious, intellectual, and reflective leaders in our community. As an organization that prioritizes the needs of our community, Ethnic Studies is foundational to the education of our youth.

As an Ethnic Studies educator, I have the honor of teaching the subject that transformed my own life and my relationship with my community, culture, and history. In my classroom, I have built a vibrant learning community where students come to confront history with courage and compassion, discover their untold stories, develop their critical consciousness, determine their role in making history and transforming their communities. A key feature of my curriculum is infusing Arab American Studies into each unit and engaging students in a critical discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is essential to understanding core Ethnic Studies concepts such as power, hegemony, settler colonialism, imperialism, and solidarity. I fear that erasing Palestine from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and moving Arab American studies to an appendix is in itself hegemonic and reinforcing a legacy of global imperialism, xenophobia, and islamophobia in the Arab & Muslim community.

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My colleagues and I 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. Those who wish to remove any mention of Palestine from the ESMC claim that teaching this history and a critique of the state of Israel is inherently anti-Semitic. This echoes the sentiments of those who say that critiquing the very real shortcomings of the United States and our history of oppression is essentially anti-American. Neither is true. Ethnic Studies is about embracing our history to confront even the painful parts and approaching these complex topics with critical thinking & analysis. This is the rigorous, honest Ethnic Studies experience that our students and communities deserve.

As an Ethnic Studies Department, we are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from other 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.

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,

Hannah Nguyen
Ethnic Studies Department Lead
9th Grade Teacher Lead
ARISE High School