



January 18, 2021

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

**Re: IfNotNow Bay Area's OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC**

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of IfNotNow Bay Area, we are 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 members of IfNotNow, a movement of young American Jews working to end the occupation, we are particularly concerned about the inclusion of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism in the newest version of the curriculum, and the elimination of any mention of Palestine and Palestinians.** These changes are unacceptable. The IHRA definition not only silences Palestinians, but further damages our Jewish communities — already torn apart by the mistaken idea that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic. As Jews firmly rooted in our tradition, and committed to fighting the occupation, we know this couldn't be further from the truth. Choosing the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism and then relegating Arab American studies to the appendix is also incredibly damaging to Arab Jews in particular, and makes it harder for all Jews to build the broad coalitions of solidarity we need to fight white supremacy and white nationalism. Please do not only consult individuals from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the JCRC, and AIPAC on issues that concern so many Jews who couldn't disagree with the positions of those organizations more.

We want to note that 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 their expertise denied.

We plead with you to be on the side of repair, and we echo and uplift 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.

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,

Binya Koatz, Gabriel Kahn and Penina Eilberg-Schwartz  
on behalf of IfNotNow Bay Area