



Attn: Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

August 13, 2019

RE: Protect and improve Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear California Department of Education Instructional Quality Commission,

On behalf of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), we write for two purposes -

1. To urge you to protect the movement and progress of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, and
2. To provide comments on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, specifically on the Asian American history section to include a much more comprehensive curriculum of the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in California.

SEARAC is a national civil rights organization that empowers Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese American communities to create a socially just and equitable society. The Southeast Asian American (SEAA) community is the largest refugee community ever to be resettled in the United States. We now number over 3.1 million in the country today, with one million calling California home.¹ SEAA communities continue to experience low educational attainment where 38.3% of Laotian, 38.2% of Cambodian, 36% of Hmong, and 26.8% of Vietnamese Americans do not have a high school diploma, compared to just 18.5% of total adults in California.²

We applaud the California Department of Education's effort to implement AB 2016 (Alejo) in a timely manner by convening a Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee and developing a draft of the model curriculum. **We urge you to protect and improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum despite uninformed opposition from some media and other specialized interest groups.** For the past 50 years, students, faculty, families, and communities have fought extensively for ethnic studies to be a legitimate academic discipline. Research shows that taking an ethnic studies course can increase school attendance, grade-point average, and the amount of school credits a student earns.³

We believe that California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum must be robust and reflect the diverse populations that make up California, including the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, where school districts can pull curricula of relevant communities into their classrooms. Unfortunately, we do not see that reflected in the current model curriculum.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, each group alone or in combination

² US Census Bureau, 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/>



We request that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum include the following critical content -

- Include curriculum on the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) in San Francisco and Berkeley, as they were the pioneers of the ethnic studies movement. We would not be discussing CA's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum today without the work they started decades ago.
 - Include historical Asian American community activism organizations, such as Asian American Political Alliance, Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, Red Guards, Wei Min She/Asian Community Center, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.
- Include curriculum covering the Iu-Mien, Japanese, Korean, Lao, South Asian, and Vietnamese American communities.
- There is very little curriculum that touches on Cambodian and Hmong American communities. We need curriculum that explore the immigrant and refugee experiences of the communities and discusses the discrimination and resiliency these communities have faced as Americans.
- The Asian American curriculum lacks appropriate classes, as well as homework, where students are able to digest information and deepen their understanding and analysis of what they are learning.
- Not only does ethnic studies require the learning of ethnic and racial groups, but they should also discuss how systems, such as capitalism, white supremacy, etc., and the multiplicity and intersectionality of our identities (i.e. race, gender, age, sexuality, class, etc.), impact society.
- The appendices are not integrated into the curriculum. The curriculum needs to state how to use the appendices appropriately.
- There is not a uniform structure of each "lesson" in the curriculum. Some units are developed, while others are less comprehensive and thorough.

We urge the Instructional Quality Commission to protect the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, carefully review the curriculum, and make the appropriate changes and additions we have proposed above. These changes will be crucial to the success of the students from school districts that will turn to this model curriculum for guidance. We look forward to continuing this partnership as we seek to ensure that all students in California public schools are able to learn about their history and each other's histories to obtain cultural awareness, self-determination, and community.

For questions or more information, please contact Nkauj Iab Yang at nkaujiab@searac.org.

Best,

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Director of California Policy and Programs, SEARAC