



August 15, 2019

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

**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) and the undersigned 6 organizations, 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, and California is home to more than 1 million SEAs, including over 764,000 Vietnamese Americans, over 118,000 Cambodian Americans, over 101,000 Hmong Americans, and nearly 83,000 Laotian Americans.<sup>1</sup>

We applaud the California Department of Education's effort to implement AB 2016 (Alejo) in a timely manner by convening an 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**

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 1-Year Estimates

**some media and other specialized interest groups.** As a group of organizations working nationwide for educational justice and equity, we support the will of students, faculty, families, and communities in California who have fought extensively for the past 50 years 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.<sup>2</sup> This is critical for SEAA students, as SEAA communities continue to experience low educational attainment. 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.<sup>3</sup>

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, so that school districts can pull curricula of relevant communities into their classrooms. Unfortunately, we do not see that reflected in the current model curriculum.

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

- Content 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. This content should also 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.
- Content that covers the Iu-Mien, Japanese, Korean, Lao, South Asian, and Vietnamese American communities.
- Content that explores the immigrant and refugee experiences of the Cambodian and Hmong American communities and discusses the discrimination and resiliency these communities have faced as Americans, as currently there is very little information on these communities.
- Appropriate classes and homework in the Asian American curriculum that supports students to take in information and deepen their understanding and analysis of what they are learning.
- In addition to the learning of ethnic and racial groups, discussion of how systems (e.g. capitalism, white supremacy, etc.) and the multiplicity and intersectionality of identities (e.g. race, gender, age, sexuality, class, etc.) impact society.
- Appendices that are integrated into the curriculum. The curriculum must state how to use the appendices appropriately.
- Uniform structure for each "lesson" in the curriculum. Some units are developed, while others are less comprehensive and thorough.

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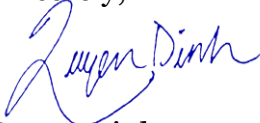
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/>

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, 2011-2013 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

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 can learn about their history and each other's histories to obtain cultural awareness, self-determination, and community.

For questions or more information, please contact Quyen Dinh, Executive Director, at [quyen@searac.org](mailto:quyen@searac.org).

Sincerely,



Quyen Dinh  
Executive Director  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

Undersigned Organizations:

ARISE

Chinese American Progressive Action

Japanese American Citizens League

OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

SEAeD Coalition

Vietnamese American School Board Association