ACTION TOOLKIT



34 organizations

File Amicus Brief in California Superior Court to Fight the Israel Lobby's Attack on Palestine Education and Ethnic Studies in Schools

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WHY THIS MATTERS

The Brandeis Center and StandWithUs, two pro-Israel advocacy organizations, are suing California to eliminate Ethnic Studies curriculum that includes Palestine and settler colonialism frameworks that teaches students to analyze U.S. history and current events. If they win, students statewide lose the freedom to explore history without censorship. This pressure is already playing out in districts from Los Angeles to Oakland to Santa Clara Unified.

This is not just about Palestine. Settler colonialism is how students study Native dispossession, slavery, and immigration alongside Palestine. If a lawsuit can remove one community's story, it opens the door to removing any education that represents us. In California, nearly half of children have an immigrant parent. For them, Ethnic Studies is where their families' histories are taught as part of this country's story.

Our amicus brief, signed by 34 organizations, tells the court this isn't about one curriculum in one district. It's about whether California students have the right to learn real Ethnic Studies.

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AMICI

1. Alameda Families and Friends for Collective Liberation
2. AMCA-SD: Arab & Muslim Community Alliance - San Dieguito
3. Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC)
4. Berkeley Families for Collective Liberation
5. Berkeley Jewish Parents for Collective Liberation
6. California Right to Learn and Belong
7. Campbell Coalition
8. Center for Racial Justice
9. Coalition for Liberated Ethnic Studies
10. Collective for Inclusive Education (CIE)
11. Council on American-Islamic Relations, CA
12. East Bay Families for Ceasefire
13. Ethnic Studies Council at the UC
14. Frontline Catalysts
15. Irvington High School Muslim Student Association
16. Jackets for Palestine, Berkeley High School
17. Japanese American Families For Justice
18. Jewish Voice for Peace
19. JUST Education Collective
20. Majdal Community Center
21. Monta Vista High School Muslim Student Association
22. Muslim Caucus of High School Democrats of America
23. Muslim Leadership Council of San Diego
24. Oakland Families for Collective Liberation
25. Orange County Ethnic Studies Alliance
26. Pájaro Valley for Ethnic Studies and Justice
27. San Diego Families for Liberation
28. San Marcos Families for Equity
29. Santa Cruz Black Coalition for Justice and Racial Equity
30. SDUSD Parents Group
31. SPARK
32. Teachers 4 Social Justice
33. Tobera Project
34. Xicanx Institute for Teaching & Organizing (XITO)

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WHAT AN AMICUS COULD ACCOMPLISH

We hope to build a united front demonstrating broad public policy support for students' right to learn real Ethnic Studies including Palestine. Educate the public on the importance of Ethnic Studies, build community power, amplify messages of safety in solidarity, and against U.S. imperialist wars. Power building elements of the political campaign:

- Amplify demands for transparency/no anti-democratic back room concessions with special interests;
- Demonstrate to local & statewide policy makers we are here and organized;
- Show a united front among administrators, educators, students and parents (professors are educators)
- Build media presence, create comms tools lifting student and teacher voices that can be used in legislative advocacy and local school board advocacy.
- Build base through accessible range of actions to engage parents, students, teachers in winnable campaign. (This tool kit includes tiered action, including social and mainstream media actions; school-board actions, emails.)

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TAKE ACTION: EMAIL YOUR SCHOOL BOARD, UNION, AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Subject: Support Ethnic Studies—Don't Let Lawfare Silence Classrooms

I'm writing as a [parent / educator / member of group name] in [district name] about a lawsuit that threatens learning across California schools, starting with Ethnic Studies and reaching history, science, English, art, and school libraries.
The Brandeis Center and StandWithUs are suing the California Department of Education to remove Ethnic Studies curriculum that includes Palestine. If the suit succeeds, it sets a precedent that any group can use litigation and pressure campaigns to strip lawful instruction out of our schools. The same logic could be turned on a U.S. history unit, a climate science lesson, a poem in English class, a student's artwork, or a book in the library.

An amicus brief supporting dismissal has now been filed, signed by 30 organizations, including [ours / name of group]. It shows policymakers that this support is broad, organized, and growing. Nearly half of California's children have at least one immigrant parent. Their families' histories belong in our classrooms. Ethnic Studies exists because communities fought for it. In 1968 and 1969, the Third World Liberation Front, a coalition of Black, Latino, Asian American, and Native students, went on strike at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley to win the nation's first College of Ethnic Studies. It connected struggles at home with struggles abroad, and Black and Asian American organizers have long stood in solidarity with Palestinians. Students deserve to learn real history, and educators deserve the freedom to teach it. I'm asking [School Board / District / Union] to:

- Publicly affirm your commitment to Ethnic Studies, including education about Palestine and U.S. militarism, and to honest teaching in every subject and in our libraries, at an upcoming meeting or in a written statement.
- Commit to transparency. Decisions about curriculum or library materials in response to this case or related complaints should be made in the open with students, families, & educators, not through backroom concessions.
- Stay informed about the case and how it could affect our district. I'm happy to share the brief and sign-on information.

Thank you for standing with our students' right to learn.
In solidarity,
[Name / Role / relationship to district]

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TAKE ACTION ON NOV 18: PUBLIC COMMENT AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

We're planning a mass action across our groups at local school board meetings on or around Nov 18. Aim for a 1-2 minute public comment.

- Open with your role. Parent, educator, student, or community member in [district]. If you or your organization is part of the amicus, say so up front. It shows the board this isn't one voice.
- State the threat plainly. The Brandeis Center and StandWithUs are suing to gut Ethnic Studies statewide. They are starting with Palestine. They will not stop there.
- Name the gateway. Censoring Palestine is how they get to censor all of our stories. If they can erase one people's history from the classroom, every community's history is next: Black, Latinx, Asian American, Indigenous, Muslim, Jewish, and Arab students alike.
- Localize it. Name your district's Ethnic Studies program, what students have told you about it, or what it took to build.
- Name the stakes. If this suit succeeds, any group can sue over any curriculum it opposes, anywhere in California. This is lawfare, and it is designed to scare teachers into silence.
- Make a clear ask. Ask the board to stay informed on the case and publicly affirm its commitment to 1. uncensored Ethnic Studies. 2. protect Arab, Palestinian, Muslim and SSWANA histories & lived experiences in the classroom. 3. denounce anti-Palestinian racism.
- Close with urgency, not despair. "We built this program together. We're not giving it up without a fight."

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TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN OPED



For Op-Eds aim to write 600-800 words with the following structure:

1. Lede: Open with a concrete scene — a classroom, a student's experience, a specific moment from Ethnic Studies coursework.
2. The threat: Explain the lawsuit and what's at stake in plain terms — no legal jargon.
3. Why it matters beyond the classroom: Connect to broader stakes—precedent-setting, chilling effect on curriculum nationwide, whose history gets taught.
4. Local grounding: Reference your district or community specifically; op-eds land better with a local hook than abstract statewide framing.
5. The coalition: Note the breadth of support — Black, Xicano/Latinx, API, SWANA, and Native community groups standing together in the amicus.
6. Call to action: What you want readers to do — attend a school board meeting, contact their district, share information.

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TAKE ACTION: HOST A TEACH-IN



Invite people already impacted by the case and the people with power to act on it:

Teachers/students/parents, your school board members, union reps, and local Ethnic Studies or Palestine advocates or historians who can speak to what's at stake locally. Keep the room mixed—insiders bring credibility, newcomers bring numbers.

How to Host a 60 min Teach-In

Promote the event in trusted groups, greet folks at the door, have a couple of steady hands watching the room, and know your deescalation plan if needed.

1. Welcome (5 min) - Why we're here: Our schools are under attack.
2. Frame it (5 min) - Lawsuit could let any group sue to strip curriculum they disagree with, anywhere. Why the amicus.
3. Testimony (15 min) - Teacher, parent, and/or student shares real classroom impact.
4. Teach (10 min) - Cover: (a) Brandeis Center/StandWithUs suing CDE over Ethnic Studies on Palestine/militarism, (b) precedent risk, (c) local Ethnic Studies history—who fought for it here.
5. Q&A (10 min)
6. Action (10 min) - Everyone sends the email template to their school board, live, from their phone.
7. Close (5 min) - Count emails sent. Point to @k12defense and k12defense.org.

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TAKE ACTION: MAKE A SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO

For Videos & Social Media try to make it short & punchy.

You can get inspo ideas from K12 Legal Defense on Instagram.

Core messages:

- "California, our schools are under attack."
- A lawsuit is trying to eliminate Ethnic Studies education about Palestine and U.S. militarism from California classrooms.
- If it succeeds, any group could sue to strip curriculum they disagree with from our schools — and students statewide lose the right to learn honest history.
- Ethnic Studies wasn't handed to us — students, families, and educators fought for it. We're not letting it go without a fight.
- Mention the amicus and the breadth of support of groups standing together in the amicus.
- Tag [@K12defense] and (if applicable) say why your org signed on to the amicus supporting dismissal of the case.

QUICK ACTION: EMAIL STATE OFFICIALS

Follow this link: https://actionnetwork.org/letters/no-backroom-deals-to-erase-palestine

QUICK ACTION: REPOST SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow K-12 Legal Defense on Instagram @k12defense and repost content on the amicus.

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FAQ



What is an amicus brief?

This is a written argument to advise the court (like a persuasive essay). The brief is from "amici"- meaning "friends of the court" in Latin. Amici are not parties to the case, meaning they are not directly in the dispute. The parties in the dispute are the Brandeis Center and the CA Department of Education. An amicus brief informs the judge about the context and the consequences of his decision.

What our brief says?

The brief urges the judge to dismiss the case because the Brandeis Center and StandWithUs are trying to eliminate Palestine and Ethnic Studies, which would hurt all California students, violate our rights, and take away education that our students badly need.

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How should we prepare for possible backlash?

- Digital security first. Review your group's online safety and privacy habits.
- Get clear on your principles. Write down why your group stands for Ethnic Studies, Palestine, and all oppressed people. Make sure everyone can explain the difference between anti-Zionism (criticism of the state of Israel) and antisemitism (hatred of Jewish people).
- Keep a record. If backlash happens, save screenshots and notes — it track patterns and informs next steps.
- You don't have to engage everything. Disengaging and blocking from bad-faith accusations is often a good choice.
- Contact K-12 Legal Defense for Smear Defense, if backlash escalates.

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BACKGROUND ON BRANDEIS V. CA

K-12 Legal Defense and Leonard Carder LLP filed a motion to intervene in the lawfare case Brandeis v. CA on May 11, on behalf of 10 Palestinian and Jewish families to fight back against classroom censorship. That motion is pending. At the hearing on May 19, the judge suggested that we file an Amicus Brief, which means he wants to hear our arguments.

The core claims of the case are that antisemitism is rampant across California schools, and this is caused by education about Palestine and ethnic studies, therefore such education must be eliminated. The case is premised on the false equation that including Palestinian perspectives or criticism of Israel is equal to antisemitism. The plaintiffs seek a court order to require antisemitism training (coordinated with the plaintiffs, so presumably based on their distorted anti-Palestinian definition of antisemitism) for all California educators, and to install an independent antisemitism monitor in 14 school districts. A monitor is essentially a speech filter. It means an outside authority will screen classroom content to eliminate Palestinian history. We know the installation of court monitors will eliminate Ethnic Studies and content about Palestine because just the threat of being watched is enough to make educators avoid the topic entirely in this repressive environment.

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BACKGROUND ON BRANDEIS V. CA

Our intervention arguments emphasize all students right to learn and belong, including our rights to:

- Free speech—including the right to receive information about Palestine and Ethnic Studies, U.S. imperialism, and our shared histories of settler colonialism—free from viewpoint discrimination & judicially-enforced censorship.
- Equal access to education—free from anti-Palestinian discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or national origin.
- Religious freedom—It burdens Jewish students' freedom for the state to weigh in on a debate within the Jewish community and impose on Jewish students a negative and false stereotype that Jewish identity requires support for genocide or intolerance of criticism, an identity many Jewish students reject.

Our amicus argument asserts these rights but focuses on the policy arguments and broad based interests of all students to learn Ethnic Studies, which focuses on the most historically marginalized group in the US: African Americans, Native Americans, Latinx, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (including Arab Americans).