

**From:** Alan Fisher

**Sent:** Sunday, August 9, 2020 9:37 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comment on Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

I am writing to the members of the Instructional Quality Commission as a Jewish Californian, as an academic (SLAC National Accelerator Lab at Stanford), as the father of two sons who were educated in California schools, and as the father-in-law of a California teacher, to offer my comments on the changes to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. First, I want to thank the California Department of Education for making extensive revisions to the original plan.

However, I feel that more work is needed to achieve the future of mutual understanding and tolerance toward others that should be the core goal of ethnic studies.

The new curriculum continues to promote a different and far more ideological aim. Its “Guiding Values and Principles” (Chapter 1) lean heavily on a book with the suggestive title, *Education at War*. Among other wars, such as the fight against “power structures” like “capitalism,” teachers are expected to “develop solidarity and create linkages” with “anti-Zionist” and “anti-Israel” narratives, a redundancy that harps on the same controversial message.

Teachers are asked to encourage the movement to “boycott, divest, and sanction” Israel, using the language of social justice. However, Omar Barghouti, the founder of this BDS movement, has clearly stated its goal: “We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine.” Palestinians have a right to “resistance by any means, including armed resistance.” The real lesson is tolerance toward some, but active intolerance toward others—precisely antithetical to the understanding that ethnic studies should promote.

We must be mindful of where intolerance may lead, not in some dystopian fantasy but in the real world. California’s Jewish community experienced a 21% rise in hate crimes in 2018 ([CA DOJ, 2018](#)). In 2018 nationally, Jews were the targets of 58% of hate crimes motivated by religious bias. Jews were murdered in synagogues in 2018 (Pittsburgh, PA) and 2019 (Poway, CA). My own synagogue in Redwood City, CA, was burned to the ground in 1979 in what police still classify as an unsolved hate crime.

The first ethnic-studies draft was rejected for its highly ideological content. The new draft removes some of this baggage but retains aspects of the politics and ambitions of the original authors. Are California schools supposed to preach a culture war or teach tolerance to our children?

Respectfully,  
Dr. Alan S. Fisher  
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