

August 12, 2019

Ms. Soomin Chao
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

To Chairwoman Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

I write to share my concerns about the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

As written, the current draft omits the American Jewish experience, antisemitism and historic antisemitic violence. Such absences will marginalize hundreds of thousands of Jewish students in California and limit student understanding of the diversity of people that live in the state. It is especially disconcerting to see these omissions at a time of rising antisemitism both globally and in California.

Together with the ADL, the California Legislative Jewish Caucus, survivors of the Holocaust, and victims of multiple forms of identity-based hate violence, I urge you to remedy the anti-Jewish bias from the state's model curriculum. I am attaching to this letter an addendum listing specific areas of concern in the curriculum for your review.

I strongly support the study of California's diverse history, but the statewide model must be revised so it is fulsomely inclusive of the life, culture and contributions of all.

Respectfully,


Michael Rotman

Addendum to Letter—Comments On the 2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Chapter of Model Curriculum	Comment
General	<p>The Proposed Curriculum is Severely Flawed and Unfit for Use</p> <p>The proposed Ethnic Studies Curriculum, developed by the California Department of Education, is deeply flawed and unfit for use. As outlined below, these flaws include the pervasive use of material falsehoods, misrepresentations, and the exclusion of necessary facts and foundational information. It is apparent that the authors' bear a purpose: to systematically facilitate the development of anti-Israel perspectives among impressionable students.</p> <p>This matter is particularly insulting and outrageous given that California's Jewish and Israeli-American communities have gone to great lengths to make the truth readily accessible to our broader community. Indeed, the pool of instructive resources and relationships at the disposal of educational administrators and state policymakers is vast. Any objective observer of the proposed curriculum can readily gather its systematic employment of demonization, delegitimization and double standards – each of which can indicate anti-Semitism. Sadly, even the mere proposition of this curriculum brings into doubt the intellectual standards and moral character of many who are involved in California's educational system.</p> <p>In November 2005, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recognized that anti-Israel sentiment can cross the line into anti-Semitism, and in the Commission's words, "should be distinguished from legitimate discourse regarding foreign policy." The Commission clearly stated: "Antisemitic bigotry is no less morally deplorable when camouflaged as anti-Israelism or anti-Zionism." The Commission specifically called on educational administrators to publicly speak out and "set a moral example by denouncing antisemitic and other hate speech, while safeguarding all rights protected under the First Amendment and under basic principles of academic freedom." The U.S. Department of Education's Office on Civil Rights has made the same recommendation to educational administrators.</p> <p>In March 2008, the U.S. State Department issued a detailed report on anti-Semitism globally, recognizing that anti-Zionist sentiment and criticism of Israel can cross the line into anti-Jewish bigotry. Whether intended or not, such sentiment and criticism can have the effect of promoting prejudice against Jews. As an example, the State Department noted that demonizing Israel and/or Israelis "as barbaric, unprincipled, selfish, inhumane, etc. is antisemitic and has the effect of causing audiences to associate those bad attributes with Jews in general." This type of anti-Semitism is no less hurtful or harmful than more traditional forms of anti-Jewish bigotry.</p> <p><u>Basic decency demands that the California Department of Education write a new curriculum that is objective, factually correct, apolitical, and grounded in the values of tolerance and respect for all.</u></p>

General	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Promotes National-Origin Based Discrimination and Would Make California Party to Antisemitic Hatred (Page 2, Lines 30-40)</p> <p>Among the most disturbing aspects of the proposed curriculum is its promotion of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction Movement (BDS). BDS is the formal name given to the economic and political component of a campaign being waged against the world's one and only Jewish country - attacking virtually every aspect of its historic, legal, political, economic and cultural life - with the aim of undermining the sovereignty, security and legitimacy of Israel's existence. More specifically, BDS refers to the tactics employed to discriminate against Israelis, Jews, their trade partners and supporters. BDS promotes discrimination against Israel on the basis of national origin.</p> <p>It is a thoroughly documented fact that in the course of promoting discrimination against Israel, the BDS Movement purposefully uses misinformation and baseless claims, as well as classic antisemitic themes, such as the suggestion of Jewish subversion, conspiracy, disloyalty, greed and economic control, and most importantly, blood libels. The overwhelming presence of such falsehoods dispenses with any need to consider the threshold where legitimate criticism of the Israel crosses the line into antisemitism. The BDS Movement's messaging strategy not only seeks to promote negative perceptions of Israel, but also bigoted perspectives aimed at the state's Jewish character and supporters. The State of California must not be made party to antisemitic hatred.</p>
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General	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Poses a Material Threat to the Safety and Civil Rights of Pro-Israel, Jewish and Israeli-American Students</p> <p>Boycotts of entities and individuals of specific countries often amount to ethnic, religious, racial and nationality discrimination. History repeatedly shows that when boycotts and bigoted propaganda are aimed at Jewish persons in particular, it eventually gives way to severe antisemitic discrimination, and ultimately to violent persecution. It is no coincidence that all current research data indisputably shows that Jews are among the most likely of all minority groups to be victimized in incidents motivated by hate, particularly within educational institutions.</p> <p>The attempt of the proposed curriculum to promote national-origin discrimination efforts against Israel directly contradicts the public policy of our federal government and the state of California, and the essential values of our community. If implemented, the curriculum would quickly lead to an environment of fear, intimidation and harassment for pro-Israel and Jewish students, particularly Israeli-Americans.</p>
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General	<p>Jews and Israeli-Americans Were Intentionally Excluded from the Proposed Curriculum</p> <p>Despite being an ethnic studies curriculum meant to objectively focus on American minorities, the American-Jewish community has been entirely excluded. Given the many obvious points of Jewish communal contribution throughout the history of the United States, as well as the high-profile nature of antisemitic attacks that have recently taken place in Poway and elsewhere, it is obvious that this omission was not merely due to an insensitive oversight, but rather disturbingly, was intentional.</p> <p>As stated by the California DOE, "the curriculum is written for educators or community members seeking guidance in developing a local high school ethnic studies program that reflects the pupil demographics in their communities". Per the most recent U.S. Census estimates, there are roughly 8,000,000 to 10,000,000 Americans that identify as Jewish which is 1.7% -2.6% of the total U.S. Population. There are also almost 250,000 Israeli-Americans in California. It is unacceptable that this curriculum includes no representation of Jewish and Israeli-American identity whatsoever.</p> <p>In general, the Jewish people are a distinct group bearing a variety of religious, ethnic and cultural characteristics. Likewise, they collectively possess a unique and relevant history, cultural practices, traditions, and have made key contributions to American society. American Jews and Israeli-Americans possess a unique immigrant experience, tracing back to the American Colonial period and extending through more recent waves of arrival. This includes those who fled the Holocaust and persecution, as well as others who have come to make unique contributions to America. Despite facing discrimination, Jews and Israeli-Americans have nevertheless come to exemplify important aspects of the merits to be found in America's overall values, and have made many impressive contributions to society. To invalidate Jewish and Israeli-Americans by excluding their worthwhile narratives would teach the wrong lessons to students.</p> <p>If anything, now is a time to enhance students' understanding and overall sensitivity toward the Jewish community. A report issued by the Anti-Defamation League detailed a shocking 67% increase in incidents from 2016 to 2017. A 2015 Brandeis Center-Trinity College study found that most Jewish-American college students had personally experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism. An AMCHA Initiative survey found a 45% increase in antisemitic activity on college and university campuses between 2015 and 2016. Given that antisemitic incidents are increasing at an alarming rate in the United States, it is outrageous that the proposed curriculum would nevertheless seek to instead promote the antisemitic BDS Movement, which has been widely condemned for its antisemitic nature.</p>
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Glossary	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Contradicts Public Policy and Would Immediately Compromise the Integrity and Reputation of California's Educational System</p> <p>As previously explained, BDS promotes discrimination against Israel on the basis of national origin. Nevertheless, in the glossary of the curriculum, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement is misleadingly defined as a positive social movement seeking "freedom" (Page 2, Lines 30-40). Teachers promoting this perspective would not only be misinforming students regarding the BDS Movement's harmful objectives, they would also be encouraging them to join in the perspective and discriminatory efforts of a thoroughly documented antisemitic hate group.</p> <p>Twenty-seven (27) U.S. states, including California, have passed legislation and/or official policy resolutions against BDS activity. In fact, just weeks ago congressional Republicans and Democrats overwhelmingly united to pass a resolution condemning BDS. BDS discrimination is not just morally unwelcome in America, but has furthermore been rejected as a matter of clear-eyed public policy. Adoption of the proposed curriculum would immediately compromise the integrity and overall reputation of California's public educational system.</p>
Glossary	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Demonizes Israel with the Lie of Apartheid</p> <p>In promoting the BDS Movement, the proposed curriculum's glossary engages the canard that Israel is an "apartheid" state (Page 2, Lines 31). The aim of this demonizing lie is to portray Israel as evil, malicious or lacking in morality. A simple review of the facts reveals the stunning impropriety of applying this term to Israel. In Israel, all citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion can hold public office. Arab citizens, who make up 20% of the Israeli population, are fully represented in the Knesset, have become judges seated on the supreme court, and serve as ministers of important government ministries. Despite the misrepresentations of the BDS Movement, Israeli-Arabs, Druze, Jews, and others live, work, and socialize together in a diverse society. Furthermore, 99% of non-citizen Arabs who reside in Israeli-controlled territories live autonomously under the full civil administration of the Palestinian Authority, not the Israeli government.</p> <p>The truth is that Israel is the only country in its region that maintains a climate of respect for the civil liberties of all its citizens, offers a significant independent civic life even for non-citizens, and safeguards important basic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of the press. Indeed, Israel's respect for civil liberties and basic rights like freedom of speech, religion and the press, mirrors</p>

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	<p>the founding principles of the United States; Just as Americans value their freedoms and fight to maintain them, Israelis hold them as a badge of honor and go to great lengths to uphold them.</p>
<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Models Introduction to Ethnic Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Uses an Anti-Israel Double Standard to suggest BDS is a Liberation Movement</p> <p>When explaining the concept of "liberation", the proposed curriculum legitimizes BDS by presenting it as an exemplary movement (Page 10, Lines 248-250). According to Omar Barghouti, who is widely considered the founding father of the BDS Movement, the objective is to end the Jewish nation's self-determination and sovereignty in Israel and replace it with a state in which Jews would be demographically diluted into a minority. Seeking to dispossess an indigenous nation of its self-determination in its ancestral homeland is not a liberation movement, nor does the proposed curriculum apply the suggestion to any country other than Israel.</p>
<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Models Introduction to Ethnic Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Delegitimizes Other Social Movements by Equivocating them with BDS</p> <p>Included in a list of potential social movements for teachers to review in class, BDS is equivocated with LGBTQ rights and climate change (Page 35, Lines 676-684). This ignores the widespread understanding of BDS as discriminatory and antisemitic in nature. The effect is to whitewash BDS as an indisputably legitimate organization, while inherently detracting from the legitimacy of other movements.</p> <p>In fact, a recently released report called <i>Terrorists in Suits</i> extensively details the material connections between those that head and finance the BDS Movement and designated terrorist entities. Anti-Israel terrorist groups such as Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine were involved in the formation of BDS and continue to manage BDS activity worldwide by proxy.</p>
<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Models African American Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Gives Credence to the Antisemitic Nation of Islam</p> <p>Listed among sample topic for discussion, the curriculum mentions African American Spiritual and Religious Traditions (Page 48, Lines 969-970). One particular group highlighted is the "National of Islam" [sic], likely referring to the "Nation of Islam" (NOI). NOI is led by Louis Farrakhan, a notorious anti-Semite who has referred to Jews as "termites", called Judaism a "gutter religion", and claimed that Jews and Zionists took part in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is unacceptable for an organization led by such an unabashed bigot to be legitimized in the classroom.</p>

<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Arab American Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Equivocates Israel with Historic American Injustices</p> <p>In a section on suggested topics of discussion, the proposed curriculum makes a problematic attempt to suggest equivalence between issues faced in Israel's region and those of the United States (Page 234, Lines 4956-4958). Specifically, equivocating the situation between Palestinian-Arabs and Israel with that of the United States and African-American citizens or immigration concerns is a false comparison aimed at manipulating negative perceptions and hostility among unsuspecting audiences. The effect of this dangerous misrepresentation will be to demonize Israeli-American peers and could result in the targeting of Jewish and pro-Israel students by those with strong feelings on BLM and immigration.</p>
<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Arab American Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Teaches students that Factual Integrity and Objectivity Do Not Matter</p> <p>The bias of the proposed curriculum is particularly evident in its use of highly-charged language that inherently promotes a negative perception of Israel (Page 236, Line 4992; Page 237, Lines 5030-5031; Page 241, Line 5138; Page 242, Lines 5158-5161). This bias is consistent with the Palestinian-Arab "Nakba" propaganda narrative, which seeks to falsely present Palestinians as victims of forced "dispossession" rather than willing participants in a war aimed at Israel's destruction. Students deserve to receive the facts of history with integrity and objectivity intact, free from one-sided revisionism and corrupting biases.</p>

<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Arab American Studies Course Outline - Somos Sur</p>	<p>Rap Song Demonizing Israel and Zionism (Pages 264-270, Lines 5692 - 5829)</p> <p>As part of the “hip-hop as Resistance” chapter in the proposed curriculum, students are exposed to a song called “Somos Sur”. The chorus of this song calls for the removal of “Yankees” from Palestine, inherently suggesting that Jews are colonialist invaders. The song then continues to accuse Israel of stealing land, unjustly imprisoning people, and demolishing homes. There is no legitimate basis for such demonizing lies to be presented to impressionable students.</p> <p>Furthermore, the song “Somos Sur” was written by Shadia Mansour, an extremist whose other songs deliver messages accusing Israel of terrorism, demonizing the essentially Jewish concept of Zionism, accusing Zionists of territorial and cultural thievery, and calling for the defeat of Zionism. After instructing school children sing along to a propaganda song calling to “free Palestine”, the lesson then tells students to create their own songs using “facts” learned from the curriculum. The glorification of this song and its writer would have the effect of demonizing and degrading Jewish and Israeli-American students and would result in a climate of fear, harassment and intimidation.</p>
<p>Chapter 2: Sample Course Arab American Studies Course Outline</p>	<p>The Proposed Curriculum Glorifies Antisemitic Figures as Role Models</p> <p>The curriculum glorifies several problematic figures as role models for children. The most concerning is Linda Sarsour (Page 235, Line 4970). Linda Sarsour has consistently expressed hatred for Jews and the State of Israel and works toward the political tolerance of such hateful views. Sarsour once even expressed support for sexual violence against a woman.</p> <p>Sarsour has actively tried to delegitimize the connection between Jews and Israel. In October of 2012, Sarsour tweeted out “Nothing is creepier than Zionism”. Recently, she claimed that Jesus was Palestinian, a gross example of historical delegitimization. Of course, Linda Sarsour also strongly advocates for the antisemitic BDS Movement while downplaying incidents of hate and violence against Jewish persons.</p> <p>Regarding feminism, Sarsour has charged that Zionist-feminist women are not true feminists, in an effort to dispossessing them of their identities. Even worse, she joked about the removal of the genitals of a prominent feminist who had been the victim of FGM. Furthermore, Sarsour associates with open anti-</p>

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	<p>Semites and known terrorists. Linda Sarsour is an ally of Louis Farrakhan, and publicly embraced deported terrorist, Rasmea Odeh.</p> <p>A person who embraces terrorists, stands with antisemitism, jokes about FGM, downplays antisemitic victimization, and support BDS discrimination is not a fit role model for California's students.</p>
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