

**From:** Rebecca Wahba  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 5:13 PM  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] CDE Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Hi, my name is Rebecca Wahba, I am a university student at Arizona State but I live and have lived in California my whole life. I am also a Jew. It is important to me that other young Jewish students learn about their people in a way that does not demean, invalidate, or demonize their existence.

I would like to thank the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

As a Mizrahi Jew, I am both proudly Jewish and proudly Middle Eastern. My ancestors lived continuously in the Middle East for over 2,500 years. My great grandparents from Egypt and Iraq left their countries because of antisemitism and later the rest of their families were kicked out because of their religion because they were Jews. And this shaped my identity as a Jew. This story, this experience, common among Middle Eastern Jews is not shared or taught nearly enough.

I identify [as one of the 500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage](#) who was ignored in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum. My family comes from a region that is racially, ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse yet the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum fails to reflect Middle Eastern demographics both here and abroad.

In keeping with AB 2016's objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," my community, and the [more than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups](#) in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The issues with the school curriculum are clear, there is not equal representation of Jews specifically Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries such as my family. This among other problems with the curriculum such as, the primary reference of Jews in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum is in the context of our communities being the beneficiaries of white privilege – my Middle Eastern Jewish community, which is composed of multiple immigrants and people of color, is completely erased. I fear this unit will contribute to the dangerous antisemitic trope that, "[Jews Have Too Much Power](#)." Furthermore, this reference ignores the experiences of European Jews who continue to be personally impacted by violent white-supremacy, genocide, and acts of antisemitism. It is also extremely important to point out the fact that as of the 2018 California Hate Crime Statistics noted that Anti-Jewish events increased by over twenty percent. At a time when there is great need to provide our students with high-quality educational content related to bigotry, it is essential to incorporate adequate instructional material on antisemitism – not just simplistic references to it, it needs to be taught in a comprehensive manner.

I am asking for the school board to make adjustments to the revised curriculum to better represent the Jewish people as an ethnic minority and other underrepresented minorities:

- All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, and other minority groups from the region [who together represent 60% of California's Middle Eastern population and have asked for inclusion](#). In order for the curriculum to avoid an essentialist understanding of Arabs and the Middle East, and in order to be well balanced, each group should be equally and equitably represented in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum.

- I would like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson plan, "[Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews](#)" produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, as it will provide students with high-quality instruction on contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience. This lesson plan was written by a scholar of Middle Eastern education specifically to fit into California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- The ESMC should make clear that under the "broadly defined umbrella of Asian Studies" are Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent ~60% of CA's MENA population. California Department of Education's Chapter 3 agrees: appropriate topics in the Asian section of Ethnic Studies courses are "the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners."

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Rebecca Wahba  
Californian, Student, and Jew