

J. Mathy Wasserman

August 11, 2019

Ms. Soomin Chao, Chair, Instructional Quality Commission California Department of
Education
1430 N. Street

Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

To Chairman Chai and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

As a community leader, I am writing not as a member of the governing board of the Las Virgenes Unified School District which serves the Cities of Agoura, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, and Westlake Village and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, including Bell Canyon and parts of Woodland Hills and West Hills, but as a concerned constituent in California. I would like to share my substantial concerns with the draft of the 2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). As a life-long supporter of public education, this makes me extremely concerned about how a panel, this politically motivated can exist in public education and I must insist that the ESMC only move forward with a complete revision.

In reviewing the materials, the ESMC draft does not even comply with its primary principle, "Include accurate information based on current and confirmed research to...promote critical thinking and rigorous analysis of history, systems of oppression, and the status quo in an effort to generate discussions on futurity, and imagine new possibilities." Throughout the materials and glossary, the ESMC is inaccurate and misleading, with statements based on opinion and not research or facts. In addition, the draft reflects a dangerous anti-Jewish bias.

The global history of discrimination, diaspora, and hateful violence, as well as lessons on awareness and acceptance, are crucial to the intentions of the ESMC but the exclusion of antisemitism marginalizes the American Jewish/California Jewish experience. Further, while we appreciate the broader inclusions of "Islamophobia" and other forms of discrimination in the Glossary, the noticeable absence of antisemitism or the Armenian Genocide are not appropriate.

Similarly, when recommending support material, a racist song with lyrics promoting a classic antisemitic trope that Jewish people run the media is inappropriately suggested. Reuters reports that antisemitic violent crimes have increased 13% over last year in major Western democracies including the United States. My birthplace, Pittsburgh suffered the deadliest attack on Jewish the United States with the Tree of Life massacre. Here in California, the Poway Chabad shooting adds to the violence manifested from antisemitism in the last year alone. These are among the many

indicators that the ESMC has turned a blind eye to hatred and terrorism against a community and endorsed echoes of Nazi propaganda.

Further, the ESMC draft delivers sole condemnation for Israel in biased factually inaccurate statements regarding, and in outright support of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. The BDS hate movement intentionally uses misinformation and false claims, as well as classic anti-Semitic themes, such as the suggestion of Jewish subversion, conspiracy, disloyalty, greed, and economic control.

This dangerous slant extends beyond intentional exclusions for marginalized groups of our population. The ESMC panel even offers highly biased definitions of “Capitalism” and “Intellectualism” as being comparable to the oppressiveness of “racism” and “white supremacy.” At its core, this contradicts the values of ESMC content: “to empower students to be engaged socially and politically, enable students to develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism” [Chapter 1, Line 14-16]

It would be tragically ironic and troubling, if ESMC, while hiding behind disingenuous approaches to holistic humanization and critical consciousness, (essential values to the ESMC to help alleviate prejudice and bigotry), instead added to conflicts, discrimination, and hatred. Without convening a new panel free of political bias, narrow ideology, and discriminatory beliefs, the ESMC will add false fuel to an educational subject that requires broader objectivity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. B.', written in a cursive style.

Addendum Attached with specific citing from the curriculum