

The California Department of Education received 21 additional emails that contained language from the bullets in the comment below. Other similar comments may have been posted separately.

From: Rabbi Corey M. Helfand (PSC)
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 3:52 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: [email redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ESMC community engagement

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

Thank you for considering comments from community members and engaging the community of Californians in the ESMC development process. It's a privilege to be able to submit these comments.

I, Rabbi Corey Helfand, a resident of California for the last decade, a US Citizen, and rabbi and spiritual leader for a Bay Area Jewish community representing more than 1000 people, appreciate some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). And at the same time, I remain deeply worried by the imposition of the offensive, one-sided political ideology that still remains in this proposed draft of California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. I am a parent of students in the California school system and the rabbi and spiritual leader to hundreds of students in the California public schools. I take pride in the diversity that is California, and I am concerned that the new proposed curriculum excludes and misrepresents large groups of California's students and can fuel discrimination.

Additionally, I am an active member and leader of the Peninsula Multifaith Coalition and the Peninsula Solidarity Cohort, which brings together faith leaders and by extension thousands of different congregants of different faith backgrounds in an effort to promote peace, equality, equity, and a shared sense of understanding about each of our backgrounds. More importantly, as a faith leader and educator, I care deeply about critical thinking, deep understanding and engagement with all people. I care about this matter and I live this as a faith leader, a parent and a human being. I want an ethnic studies curriculum to succeed. More strongly, I want to be a partner with you in advocating for the passage of and success of this curriculum. We must bring Ethnic Studies to our students. And in order to do this, honestly, thoughtfully and equitably, I would be remiss in not sharing with you where there is still important and critical work to be done before this curriculum can be brought to our schools.

Here are my major concerns:

ESMC guiding values and principles need revision because they:

- do not reflect California's shared values, nor the values laid out in AB 2016
- establish an "us vs them" agenda

- are partly based on the book *Education at War*, which encourages “solidarity” and “linkages” with BDS, and anti-Israel narratives, harmful to many Jewish students. The guiding principles for this curriculum must be on providing prospective and opportunities for understanding. If BDS is presented (not promoted) as a change agent, than its presentation must be problematized to show the different dimensions of it and how it operates as a cover for anti-Semitism.

The second draft does not prevent teaching offensive politically indoctrinating and anti-Israel elements from ESMC’s first draft.

- Please add Elements of Balanced Curriculum from the LA Unified School District’s Ethnic Studies Curriculum to provide solid ground rules for course development
- Numerous sections of the ESMC need revision to expose students to “multiple and often competing sources of information” and ensure that “diverse viewpoints are respected.”

The few references to Jews are misleading and offensive. We must:

- Remove links to and advocacy of virulently anti-Israel pro-BDS sites with malicious slander about imaginary genocide
- Include Mizrahi and other Jews of color
- Add a definition of antisemitism to address various contemporary manifestations of antisemitism, including stereotyping and double standards against Jews and Jewish institutions from all parts of the political spectrum.
- Add specific lesson materials on antisemitism, one of the fastest growing forms of hatred in the world, as a form of racism and bigotry

References to Middle Eastern communities should not favor one community over others. Teaching students “to link” to organizations that do not present multiple dimensions or perspectives of all parties only fuels hate instead of developing deep understanding. We must teach our students to be critical thinkers by presenting fair and unbiased information so that they may form their own opinions rather than be intentionally led down a path that perpetuates “othering.”

The ESMC should be revised to accurately and equitably represent the cultural and racial diversity of California so it is balanced, as required by SBE standards and ESMC Guidelines

- If the ESMC includes ethnic groups from the Middle East, it should include Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern communities proportionately. (See MENA [coalition letter of communities](#) which explains this in depth.)
- The depiction of Jews from Arab lands dismisses the particular experience that such Jews faced in those countries. Their experience is not the same as all people from

Arab lands as they are depicted. Their experience is erased in this portion of the curriculum.

I urge you to make significant further revisions to the ESMC to address these concerns. Please revise the Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC to use more precise and inclusive terminology, to align with the ESMC Guidelines, to build bridges of intergroup understanding, and to ensure critical thinking. Then adjust the lessons and sample topics accordingly to match the revised principles.

Please know, from the depths of my heart and soul, that I want support and advocate for the passage of an Ethnic Studies Curriculum for our students. It is long overdue and must be a cornerstone of our educational system. And at the same time, let's do the hard work now to get it right so that we can not only teach our students Ethnic Studies, but do so with integrity and in a way that we can be proud of.

With deepest appreciation and thanks for your support and commitment to ensuring that our children are taught that every person matters and that we are all created in God's image.

Warm regards,

Rabbi Corey Helfand

Senior Rabbi, Peninsula Sinai Congregation

Pronouns: He/Him/His

[address redacted]

Foster City, CA