

August 9, 2019

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

Dear Chairwoman Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

I write to add my voice to that of the thousands of Californians and numerous organizations and coalitions that have expressed alarm over the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). In its current iteration, the ESMC falls short of its goal to "prepare pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," as a result of its erasure of, and at times hostility to, the American Jewish experience, and its one-sided representation of the highly complex and disputed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people.

I support and draw your attention to the detailed comments submitted by the Institute for Curriculum Services and the Jewish Public Affairs Committee, as well as by Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa and the Legislative Jewish and LGBT caucuses. Among the concerns shared by these broad-based and diverse groups are 1) the omission of Jews as an ethnic group and of anti-Semitism as a form of bias and prejudice; 2) the negative stereotypes of Jews and Israel; and 3) the inclusion of, and support for, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which presents a single, divisive viewpoint on a complex issue and creates a hostile environment for those who disagree with or question its principles.

California students deserve the best education possible, and will surely benefit from an ethnic studies curriculum that serves to alleviate prejudice and bigotry and supports inclusion, empathy, and critical thinking. The current draft of the ESMC does not do this. I hope that my letter, along with the collective voice you are hearing from Californians, will help the Commission to reflect on the deep flaws of the draft and demonstrate the need to introduce revisions. Among these are a sensitive inclusion of California Jewish history and culture, as well as mention of anti-Semitism and the elimination of irrelevant and inflammatory polemics about Israel. These revisions are critical to the ESMC's ability to meet its own standards of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Lechner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.