

From: Natalie Weiss
Sent: Friday, August 9, 2019 12:32 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)

Dear Chairwoman Chao and California Department of Education committee members-

Please accept this form as my attempt to voice my concern over the current proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). At a time of rising incidences of antisemitism across the country, and around the world, it is more important than ever that young adults of all backgrounds understand the Jewish experience. Part of this understanding is the appreciation for the Jewish cultural, religious, historical and spiritual connection to the land and State of Israel.

The current curriculum shows a shocking indifference, and even hostility towards, the American Jewish experience and community. The curriculum erases American Jewish history by failing to include Jews in a meaningful way, and it neglects any discussion of antisemitism. It is important for society to understand that Judaism is first a peoplehood with its original homeland in the land of Israel. Judaism is not simply a religion. Jewish identity encompasses not just a connection to a faith tradition; it is also an ethnic and cultural identification. Jews are a distinct and diverse American ethnic group deserving fair and respectful inclusion in any Ethnic Studies curriculum. The ESMC as it is currently drafted; however, fails to impart these basic lessons.

The introduction of the proposed curriculum states that, "The implementation of Ethnic Studies presents an opportunity for teachers to... enable students to develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism." Despite this stated goal, the curriculum does not feature a single lesson about the Jewish community, mentioning Jews only in passing. With antisemitism rising and ignorance about the Jewish people still a major problem in our society, the exclusion of Jews from this curriculum is deeply disappointing.

I, as a member of the California Jewish community, and a mother with a child who has gone through the California public school system (and still attends a California Public high school - Capistrano Valley High School in Mission Viejo) urge you to add lessons about American Jews as an ethnic group, including those who fled the Holocaust, oppression in the Middle East, and discrimination in former Soviet Union. These lessons are more important than ever in our school system.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns, and myself and my fellow Jewish community look forward to seeing these proposed changes addressed by our State's department of education.

Sincerely,

Natalie Weiss