

From: JYCA staff

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 11:04 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter from CA Jewish Youth in Support of Ethnic Studies Curriculum

To the California Department of Education (CDE),

We are writing today in support of the original CA AB2016 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) draft (08/15/19) and to advocate for the implementation of Ethnic Studies in California schools. We are advocating that Arab American and Pacific Islander studies be reinstated and for the writers of the original curriculum to be reconvened and included in the ongoing process.

There are many ways we define ourselves. We are high schoolers, Jews, activists, and young people. We are a multiracial, multicultural group of youth and allies in relationship together. This letter is being written primarily by Jewish youth of color, with the support of our white peers. As Jewish youth of color, we marvel at what it would mean to have this curriculum in our schools not only as Jews, but as people of color (POC). We crave the history, herstory, and inspiration from our POC communities to be included in the ESMC. As white Jewish youth, we are allies to our Black and Brown peers who wish to see themselves reflected in their education, and we recognize that Ethnic Studies is an opportunity to decenter white-dominated history and shift toward anti-racist learnings.

As a unified cohort, we affirm that learning from this curriculum would help all Jews and all students establish self and community identity. The National Education Association published a recent [review of Ethnic Studies Research](#) that found that an appropriately designed Ethnic Studies Curriculum creates positive outcomes for white students in addition to students of color “since exposure to a systematic analysis of power and cross-racial interaction is newer to white students than to students of color.” This is too important not to be implemented. Simply put, we need Ethnic Studies, and we need this particular curriculum, now.

As Jews, our ability to own and share our narratives is vital to finding safety. It’s so clear to us that we need to be listened to when incidents of antisemitism happen. In the same way, we must listen when other groups share their experience of oppression. Particular Jewish organizations should not claim to speak for the broader Jewish community, and should not attempt to dictate the curriculum’s content or other groups’ narratives of their own experiences. To do so would, as framed by [Jewish Women of Color](#) in anticipation of the 2019 Women’s March, “runs the risk of once again silencing POC communities and dismissing the experience of POC, falling into the role of the wedge.”

[Jewish Women of Color](#) go on to say: “One role of Anti-Semitism has been to scapegoat Jews by centering us as the buffer between those with more privilege and those without”. We must not fall for this again. Those of us who are Jewish youth of color often experience a double-bind of facing antisemitism and racism. We take both seriously and want our Jewish siblings to know that our unique positions let us say with certainty that racism functions differently from antisemitism.

We want to be very clear: antisemitism is real, violence against Jews, historical and contemporary, is real. The trauma we experience is real. No one can tell us otherwise because it lives in our families and our bodies. We also believe that antisemitism props up racism, and is

often used to discredit the political movements of people of color (see [the Soros myth](#)). However, we will not let false accusations of antisemitism be used to tear down the pursuit of justice, history, and an authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum.

We support and applaud the decision to focus on Black, Indigenous, Xicanx/Latinx and Asian studies. We want to urge the Instructional Quality Commission to keep that focus and to preserve the Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies curriculum as part of Asian American Studies. Academics from the Asian American studies discipline have affirmed that Arab American and Pacific Islander studies belong within Asian American Studies. We want to see those narratives and stories. They help us to think critically about power and oppression, a fundamental goal of ethnic studies.

Antisemitism and its connection to white supremacy and white nationalism should be addressed in schools whether that's in the ESMC, through an updating of the Human Rights and Genocide curriculum, or in other aspects of classroom learning. As far as we are aware, the coalition that created ESMC is open to including antisemitism as a form of oppression in the curriculum--we support and encourage that inclusion. At the same time, we do not believe there is harm done to Jews in not including a section of the ESMC on the "Jewish American Experience." As we understand it, Jewish studies developed separately as an academic discipline that hasn't been combined into Ethnic Studies broadly. If there is a decision to change that, it should happen amongst the respective disciplines first.

As [Jews for Racial and Economic Justice](#) wrote in 2019: "We do not believe that there is a simple, 'right' response when antisemitism shows up in our social justice movements. But we do believe in staying committed to long-term organizing for racial and economic justice, especially when it gets hard." It's important to remember that this Ethnic Studies Curriculum comes out of a long movement of organizing for better representation of histories of people of color in our schools amidst great dismissal from our education system. By attacking the ESMC, the people of color who created it, and the histories and herstories shared within it, we are all harmed. That is why today we write in support of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft.

The curriculum and the current review process offer an opportunity for white Jews to create meaningful solidarity with Jews of color and other oppressed groups. Antisemitism and racism are rooted in the same source: white supremacist [Christian hegemony](#). We know that fighting white supremacy in all of our institutions, including education, is key to creating the world we want to live in. The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is one small part of the fight. To that end, we urge the State Board of Education and members of the Instructional Quality Commission to trust the expertise of the authors and support the initial draft. The originally proposed curriculum enriches our lives and the lives of our friends and peers, in solidarity with each other as multiracial human beings for racial and social justice.

Part of the fight is building deep and meaningful relationships with the people and communities centered in the curriculum. In the Jewish community, we can do that by listening, and joining in on the work that's been happening for decades. We ask for you to stand up for and alongside us in support of this investment in greater learning for all. Let's leave behind the idea that Jews are alone and must advocate only for ourselves. Instead let us move toward safety in solidarity. Let's work with the original advisory committee to ensure that the final curriculum reflects the movement, history and work they've contributed for years, and addresses antisemitism. Minor revisions are part of the process and are needed, however the vast majority of the original draft

should remain. What a dream it would be to look back as adults and say Jews were central in supporting the authentic Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum -- may it be so.

Signed,

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