

**From:** Helene Casella

**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 1:04 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Fwd: a note I just sent to the CA Dept of Education - you may also wish to chime in

Dear Instructional Quality Commission:

As a former public school teacher, counselor and administrator (served Grades 2-12), I appreciate some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), but I am concerned by several remaining elements.

**The few references to Jews are misleading and offensive.** There is no discussion of antisemitism, but you do include a UC course that equates the experience of Jewish and Irish immigrants to this country and defines them as "holders of racial privilege." Really? When was the last time anyone shot up an Irish church, or museum, or store? Never, thank goodness! By contrast, antisemitic violence is not only constant but on the rise in this country. Whether it's white supremacists shooting up synagogues as in Poway or Pittsburgh, or Black Nationalist groups on a murder rampage at a kosher grocery in Jersey City, this is something Jews contend with all the time, and it is ludicrous for a curriculum that aims to raise awareness of prejudice to exclude that fact.

You also recommend a UC course that covers the "philosophy" of the Nation of Islam, a group described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as deeply racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBT, indeed occupying "a prominent position in the ranks of organized hate." This is appalling and needs to be excised.

This curriculum also needs correction when it refers to "the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners" in Chapter 3 under "Asian." This vague language is misleading, as **California's Middle Eastern population is made up, in its majority, by ethnic groups other than Arabs.** The ESMC needs to "accurately and equitably represent the cultural and racial diversity of California so it is balanced", as the State Board of Education's Standards and ESMC Guidelines require. To be balanced and accurate, this section needs to list all these groups by name: Iranians, who comprise 26% of California's MENA population; Jews of MENA descent who comprise 28%; Assyrian Christians, Coptic Christians, other Middle Eastern Christian; Zoroastrians, Baha'is, Yezidis, and Kurds. To do otherwise -- to sweep them under the heading of "Arabs" or "other" (when in fact many of their family members have been subject to persecution and in some cases genocidal violence by their Arab neighbors) -- ranks them as less important, and is appalling cultural erasure.

More broadly, the curriculum **does not contain any language preventing its being used as a platform for hate and indoctrination.** It advocates a narrow political philosophy and establishes an "us vs them" agenda. This does not comport with the guidelines of AB 2016, and it does not serve the interests of any California students,

who all need to thrive in California's pluralistic society. It would help to add add Elements of Balanced Curriculum from the LA Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Curriculum to provide solid ground rules for course development. In general, 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".

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.

Thank you,  
Helene Casella  
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