

From: Tara Steinmetz

Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2020 5:02 PM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum - Public Comment

Dear ESMC Committee/CA Department of Education:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the recently released second draft of the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) in July 2020. I appreciate the fact that an Ethnic Studies curriculum, if done without a political agenda, is an important aspect of our education today to ensure better understanding of all ethnic groups, but if done to further a political agenda, this will only further divide our community. This especially concerns me as a Jewish citizen of this state, and as I see a rise in antisemitic hate crimes both in person and on-line, I believe it would be a grave error for this committee and this administration to not take some key concerns into consideration at this critical time.

Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) ignored the protocols meant to guarantee public transparency. At the 11th hour, IQC announced it would reinsert an unspecified lesson plan on Arab Americans within the Asian American curriculum. This lack of transparency should NOT be accepted, and draws a red flag to the Jewish community, and should do the same for this committee and this administration. Unfortunately, the antisemitic and anti-Israel bias in the 2019 draft was found in a lesson plan on Arab Americans. Due to the lack of transparency, and last minute inclusion of this exclusive additional ethnic group, this draws concerns that the curriculum being proposed for this portion of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, will again be biased and instill additional untruths about the Jewish people and further Jew hatred, which is already on the rise at an alarming rate.

As a follow-up to the IQC request for public comment on this second draft, I would like to point out a few key items for the committee's attention:

1. It should be understood that the Jewish people are NOT exclusively a religion. In fact, the Jewish people are an ethnic-religious group. We as a people have a common history, customs, language, and connection to a native land (Israel). The Jewish people are diverse, and in the diaspora, there are Jews that have immigrated to the United States from all over the world, including the middle east. To completely ignore the fact that there are Jews of color, Sephardic Jews (Jews from Spain and South American countries), Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East, would be to completely "whitewash" the Jewish community. In any Ethnic Studies curriculum, the Jewish American experience should be included, especially if a lesson plan is to include Arab Americans. This is especially insulting to the many Jewish Americans of Middle East and North African (MENA) descent, of which there are many in the State of California.
2. It is imperative that the most accurate definition of antisemitism be adopted and taught within the ESMC. This should be the definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which the US State Department adopted in 2010. As was seen in the original curriculum proposal, it is clear that the writers of the curriculum do not have an understanding or care for the dangers of spreading antisemitic rhetoric and lies. Antisemitism needs to be identified by the three D's test: Demonization, Delegitimization and Double Standard. Something is antisemitic if it Demonizes the Jewish people or the only Jewish country, Israel; if it Delegitimizes a Jewish person's right to their identity or expression of their identity, including their support of the one Jewish country in the world, and the right of the Jewish people for self determination in their ancestral homeland (Israel), and finally if Jews

as a group are held to a Double Standard, especially as it applies to Israel as it compares to all the other countries of the world. It is important that a definition of antisemitism is included in the curriculum that is commonly accepted by the majority of the Jewish people. No other minority group would accept someone else defining what they deem to be discrimination against them.

3. It is imperative that a lesson on antisemitism be included in the ESMC. It should be noted, that Jews, along with the core four ethnic groups proposed in this curriculum, have long been victims and targets of hate, violence and discrimination in the United States (and globally for millennia) - systemized by society, institutions, organized religion and government, both subtly and overtly, and directly by white supremacist groups. Antisemitism is at the CORE of the driving beliefs of extreme, white nationalism. To not sufficiently and completely discuss antisemitism, while putting forth a curriculum that states that Jews have "white privilege" is both false and dangerous. With antisemitism being the root of white nationalism, it would be remiss to not include this knowledge and context, especially as it fuels the same ideology that powers anti-Black racism. Currently antisemitism is at an all time high in our country. We MUST learn from history, and take note that when a society sees the oldest form of hatred on the rise, it is a sign that there is a moral virus growing in our society, and if gone unchecked, will lead to the demise of democracy and all that we hold dear in our country. As the Ethnic Studies claims to want to bring greater understanding amongst groups of marginalized groups, this cannot be successfully accomplished without addressing the oldest, and now largest form of hatred in our country, and that is Jew hatred. Jews make up less than 1% of the US population, but have experienced discrimination from the beginning of their first entrance into the United States. Jews were not allowed to attend colleges, social clubs, hospitals, certain neighborhoods when they first came to this country. To have the current curriculum attempt to portray Jews as "white", would be to ignore the fact that NOT all Jews are caucasian, and to also ignore the rise in white nationalism, and the white supremacist groups that do NOT see Jews as white, and to claim Jews have "white privilege" would ignore the centuries long Jew hatred that has existed in this country and abroad, especially at a time when we see violence against Jews rising both physically and on-line. Young Jews are experiencing discrimination at an alarming rate. This is seen in high schools and now even middle school. Colleges have become a breeding ground for antisemitic incidents and the spread of propaganda against Israel, which in turn results in a rise in antisemitic incidents.

As we aim to combat virulent White supremacy in this country, it is crucial to teach children how the structures of White supremacy in their most overt forms inherently rely on antisemitic ideology. The oppression of Jewish people and Black people are often at the crux of how White nationalism functions... our own 405 freeway of Los Angeles illustrated this several weeks ago in late August with an image stating that "Jews want a race war." Antisemitism is fundamental to what animates white supremacy, especially in the overt forms currently plaguing our country; however, the curriculum as it stands would never explain the function of this classic type of antisemitic statement within the structures of white supremacy, putting Jews at risk of violent ignorance and giving an incomplete picture of how to battle the White nationalism this country faces.

4. It is critical that transparency and an opportunity for public comments are allowed in ALL phases of the development of the final ESMC. For agendas to be pushed through at the final hours, shows that the goal of this curriculum is NOT education, but to push political agendas. California is a state that leads the way for innovation, and the rest of the country will be watching to see how we roll out this Ethnic Studies curriculum. It is imperative that we present a final curriculum that is fair to all marginalized communities, including the Jewish community. This is important not only to these marginalized communities, but is important to the overall framework of our society.

As a concerned California resident, I hope that the IQC will do what's right for all Californians and ensure that we can be proud of our state's rich and wonderful diversity. We can do better, and we must do better for our future generation. Make sure the ESMC achieves its goal of furthering better understanding among and between people of different backgrounds, and does NOT further increase the divisiveness and hatred that is spreading in this state and country that I am proud to be a citizen of.

Thank you,

Tara Steinmetz