

Public Input Template–2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum May 2019 Draft

(Download and use to provide specific recommendations)

Include the chapter of the model curriculum, the page number, and line number(s) to ensure that the California Department of Education and Instructional Quality Commission can reference the content of the document when reviewing your comments. Please email this document as a Word document to ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov. You may contact Kenneth McDonald, Education Programs Consultant, at kmcdonal@cde.ca.gov with any questions regarding this template or the public input process.

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General	Caleb Astrof, YULA Boys High School, Los Angeles	<p>I am writing to express my concern regarding the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum heading to the State Board of Education for review. I believe that the Model Curriculum discourages critical thought about the Jewish community, of which I am a part, and about the State of Israel, which I support.</p> <p>The Curriculum addresses the historical importance of “African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Chicana/o/x/, Latina/o/x, and Native Americans” (Chapter 1, page 4, lines 87–88). I commend the Board of Education for casting a spotlight on historically overlooked groups of Americans. I note, however, the conspicuous absence of American Jews from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. As the Curriculum notes, the ethnic studies movement of the late 1960s called for “a new curriculum that would embrace the history of all people, including ethnic minorities” (Chapter 1, page 4, lines 99–100). I, a Jewish student, believe that all students in California stand to benefit from learning about Jews’ historical experiences in the United States alongside the experiences of other minorities.</p> <p>Curricula designed for California public schools should be nonpartisan and nonsectarian. I find that the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum inappropriately takes positions on a number of sensitive historical and current issues. As drafted, the Curriculum precludes students from studying multiple perspectives, engaging in critical thinking, and developing nuanced and well-informed opinions.</p> <p>I expect that the Arab American Studies Course will be taught without political bias. But the sample topics of the “Call to Boycott, Divest, and Sanction Israel” (Chapter 2, page 234, line 4957) and of “Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico” (Chapter 2, page 234, line 4958) are clearly oriented toward presenting a particular viewpoint and precluding student dispute and debate. The terms the Curriculum advises teachers to use when discussing these sensitive topics introduce bias and do not give students the opportunity to form their own educated opinions. The Curriculum refers to the “1948 Palestine War” (Chapter 2, page 242, lines 5160–5161) and calls Palestinian displacement the “Nakba,” without any qualifiers (Chapter 2, page 242, line 5159). These terms, and others like them, are loaded signifiers, not neutral historical terms. They should be contextualized and presented within a nuanced and multi-perspective educational framework that enables students to develop their own voices and ideas.</p> <p>According to the Curriculum, Palestinians are stereotyped as “terrorists, blow up airlines, try to ‘destroy Israel’ and ‘drive the Jews into the sea’ ” (Chapter 2, page 259, lines 5561–5562). Surely these stereotypes exist. But the Curriculum fully ignores the history of violence of particular Palestinian individuals and subgroups, including actual calls to “destroy Israel” and to “drive the Jews into the sea.” Acts of terror committed by Palestinians are entirely ignored in the curriculum. Leaving out the individual acts of terror keeps the Curriculum from acknowledging Palestinians and other Arab leaders who have condemned terrorist attacks, terrorists’ tactics, and terrorist groups. The current draft of the Curriculum promotes an</p>
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		<p>overly simplistic perspective, which will prevent students from learning to contextualize these stereotypes while thinking critically about the situation.</p> <p>The Curriculum encourages students to study the BDS Movement (Chapter 2, page 234, line 4957), a movement that does not recognize or honor Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. BDS is an extremist movement. BDS should be taught, but it should be contextualized alongside moderate pro-Palestinian organizations that recognize Israel’s right to be treated like every other state in the world.</p> <p>As a high school student, I believe the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum merits further discussion before its final release. I believe the addition of an American Jewish Studies Course to the Curriculum will allow students to learn about Jews’ historical contribution to the United States. It will also help students understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of both many American Jews’ and many Arab Americans’ emotional connections to the conflict. In addition, an American Jewish Studies Course would give students the opportunity to study anti-Semitism. Given that anti-Semitic hate crimes rose 21 percent last year, according to a Department of Justice report released early last month, critical study of American Jewry and biases against it has perhaps never been more important.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration of my concerns and for your work on behalf of the students of the State of California.</p>

California Department of Education, June 2019