

Dear Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, Superintendent Tony Thurmond, and Members of the State Board of Education:

I am writing to voice my appreciation for the improvements in the third draft of the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, but also to express continuing concerns.

First, I commend the more inclusive approach of the new draft.

- It widens the lens from an exclusive focus on four “core groups” to acknowledge the contributions and struggles of the diverse ethnicities that have built our state. Many students carry family memories of marginalization, discrimination, and persecution, both here in California but often dating long before their arrival.
- I appreciate the emphasis on learning from multiple perspectives. The approach depends on skillful teachers who make use of your wide range of source materials and do not divert the program along the ideological track I will discuss later.

I would be remiss if I did not address the treatment of my own ethnicity, which is Jewish. Lesson 40 on antisemitism and Lesson 41 on Jewish Americans are important additions in this draft.

- Antisemitism, sometimes called “history’s oldest hatred,” can be a murky term. The explanations provided are well phrased and are based on the widely accepted definition of International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The final curriculum must retain this definition, and should add specificity by including the examples used by the IHRA.
- Teaching about Jews of Middle-Eastern origin (Mizrachi and Sephardic Jews) lets students discover the surprising diversity of the Jewish community. However, the authors go beyond diversity, to present antisemitism from their favored “intersectional” perspective. Jews of all skin colors have been targets. European Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and waves of Arab hatred in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century expelled most Middle Eastern Jewish communities from homelands of centuries and even millennia. Remove the intersectional ideology in teaching the story of the Jewish community and the hate directed against it.
- Emphasize that this hatred of Jews is not something foreign or from some distant past but continues here in California. In 1979, my synagogue in Redwood City was burned to the ground in a still-unsolved hate crime. In 2019, a gunman murdered a congregant at a synagogue in Poway. Although only 2% of the American population, Jews were the targets of 63% of religiously motivated hate crimes nationally in 2019.

As you develop the final version of the curriculum, I urge you to retain these substantial improvements over the previous drafts, which were based on the highly ideological framework of Critical Ethnic Studies that:

- Divides our society into groups of the oppressed and their oppressors.
- Attacks capitalism as a “system of oppression.” Our aim is to promote justice and tolerance, not to renounce the basis of our economy.
- Emphasizes ideological activism over thoughtful citizenship in a diverse state.

Despite some changes in language and tone, most of the ideological baggage of Critical Ethnic Studies remains in the new draft. This agenda is inappropriate and must be removed. For example:

- It continues to attack European and American imperialism as if this were unique. Certainly it gravely affected the four “core groups.” However, cultures throughout history have formed empires on all continents. A critique of imperialism should not focus solely on “white civilization” but should hold up a mirror to this ugly aspect of humankind.
  - Africa had many kingdoms and empires, such as pharaonic Egypt, Kongo, Ethiopia, and Lunda.
  - Empires in the Americas included the Aztec, Mayan, and Incan.
  - Asian empires included China, Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Mughals in India. Our Korean and Chinese students certainly remember the predatory Japanese conquest of a century ago.
  - Lesson 42 on Arab Americans notes the growth of an Islamic Arab empire without observing that it came about by force and forced conversion. Later, the Ottoman Turks turned Constantinople, the “Second Rome,” into Istanbul, and nearly brought Christian Europe into their Islamic empire in 1683.
- Academic jargon, although toned down, is still pompously overused. “Cisheteropatriarchy” has not found its way into the Oxford Dictionary but remains in Chapter 1. Moreover, this term implies that “oppressors,” but not the “oppressed,” have prejudices. Bigotry—both subtle and overt—is part of the human condition. No one is exempt.
- Many “important historical figures” in Lesson 6 seem selected more for their credentials as revolutionaries than as role models. Why else would the list of African Americans include Bobby Seale and Angela Davis but exclude Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and John Lewis? Consider Linda Sarsour, who said of Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Lebanese-American conservative Brigitte Gabriel, “I wish I could take their vaginas away—they don't deserve to be women.” Violent threats, even as metaphors, toward those with whom you disagree should exclude her as a feminist role model.

The goal of this curriculum should be building tolerance and understanding. To that end, replace the ideological drumbeat of Critical Ethnic Studies with a balanced and diverse viewpoints. Present the stories of the groups that comprise today's California in the broader context of world history. American racism is surely part of that, but oppression is far older and far more widespread. So is the struggle for justice. Our students must learn from the past in order to build the future of Dr. King's dream, in which: “my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Respectfully submitted,  
 Dr. Alan Fisher  
 Atherton