

From: DrMike
Sent: Monday, September 7, 2020 3:11 PM
To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on latest ESMC draft

To the IQC members:

I am writing in opposition to the current iteration of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. This draft still has significant flaws that need to be remedied:

Here are several examples of significant problems that still need to be addressed:

1. The “Guiding Values and Principles” of the ESMC should be clarified and revised to encourage critical thinking, instead of enabling harmful political agendas. The curriculum’s guiding values and principles directly reference and are based on specific pages from a book called Education at War. The relevant section of the book encourages teachers to “develop solidarity and create linkages” with anti-Zionism, BDS, and anti-Israel narratives. One of the ESMC’s guiding values is connecting to “resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels” - language which can easily be twisted to justify promoting anti-Israel and antisemitic hate in the classroom, in violation of AB331.

2. The State Board of Education’s guidelines for the ESMC require teaching about the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). TWLF fought for the just cause of including communities of color in higher education, and at the same time promoted hateful and destructive ideas about other issues. For example, one of the most prominent leaders of TWLF gave a speech in 1968 in which he, “attacked Jewish people as exploiters of the Negroes in America and South Africa and called for ‘victory to the Arab people’ over Israel,” according to a news report from that period. In another speech about TWLF, this same leader said, “it is up to us to make the revolution, to break the system, to smash it, shatter it, and destroy it, as brother Lenin said”. Vladimir Lenin was the founder of the Soviet Union, one of the most violent and oppressive empires in history. TWLF also drew significant inspiration from Mao Zedong, the communist dictator of China who was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people. Uncritical promotion of the TWLF and its ideas may violate AB331 and the California Education Code. As such, the State Board of Education’s General Principles should be revised to ensure the ESMC educates about the TWLF accurately and comprehensively.

3. The decision was made last month to expand upon the four foundational groups of ethnic studies (African American, Latinx, Native American and Asian American) by deciding to include Arab Americans-- but no other Middle Eastern group-- under Asian Americans. The last-minute addition of a lesson plan solely focused on Arab Americans is discriminatory and lacking in transparency, as it will not be subject to the same public review as the rest of the curriculum. The curriculum should be inclusive of all Middle Eastern communities in California, such as Jews, Iranians, Arabs, Kurds, Assyrian Christians, Coptic Christians, and others. (In California, 60% of those of recent ancestry in the Middle East are not Arab). There is no educational or moral justification for favoring one of these communities

over all others. The ESMC should be revised to add an inclusive unit about Middle Eastern Americans-- as submitted by JIMENA-- which goes through the same vetting process as the rest of the curriculum.

The entire Jewish community in California is thus erased from the state curriculum, except for a mention of how Jews and Irish "attained whiteness". This overlooks the experiences of Mizrahi Jews (Jews whose more recent ancestry is from the Middle East and North Africa), Jews of color, Jews from the Former Soviet Union, and other Jewish communities in California whose stories are less widely acknowledged. Our major Jewish community organizations-- the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Relations Council, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League all have submitted comments to you which oppose the erasure of the Jewish American experience, and of antisemitism, from this draft.

There are other Ethnic Studies curricula that do not share these problems-- most notably, the Los Angeles Unified School District course which is already in use in over 100 classrooms across that district. Its materials are here: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/5106> <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/13062>.

California's children deserve a high quality Ethnic Studies course. Making the changes as outlined above is necessary. In addition, it is vital not to revert back to sections of the first version of the draft which was rejected by Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond and Board President Linda Darling-Hammond.

Thank you for your consideration of these points.

Michael Harris

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