

From: Dyanna Loeb

Sent: Monday, August 10, 2020 2:06 PM

To: Ethnic Studies; [email redacted]

Cc: [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Include Antisemitism and the Middle Eastern-American Experience

Greetings,

I am Dyanna Loeb, a lifelong resident of California. I would like to thank the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. I graduated with a BA in Ethnic Studies from Mills College (in Oakland CA), so I know how life-changing this educational content can be, and I am so excited about the implementation of an Ethnic Studies curriculum in CA schools!

If we are to provide students with a truly inclusive and intersectional perspective and understanding of history and oppression, it is imperative to teach the history of the one million Jews who were ethnically cleansed or fled antisemitic persecution in the Middle East and North Africa. I am deeply troubled to see their stories and the diversity and oppression of Mizrahi Jews and of other Middle Easterner communities omitted from this curriculum.

In keeping with AB 2016's objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," the more than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

2018 California Hate Crime Statistics noted that Anti-Jewish events increased by over twenty percent while Anti-Muslim bias events decreased by more than forty percent. As a Jewish person who has experienced and witnessed religiously motivated hate, I believe our students deserve to learn about both Islamophobia and Antisemitism in an ethnic studies framework.

When the primary reference to Jews in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum is in the context of our communities being the beneficiaries of white privilege – our diverse Jewish community, which is comprised of multiple immigrants and people of color (including Ethiopian, Indian, Middle Eastern, and North African Jews and many more) is completely erased. I fear this unit will contribute to the dangerous antisemitic trope that, "Jews Have Too Much Power." Furthermore, this reference ignores the experiences of European Jews who continue to be personally impacted by violent white-supremacy, genocide, and acts of antisemitism.

At a time when there is great need to provide our students with high-quality educational content related to bigotry, it is essential to incorporate adequate instructional material on antisemitism – not just simplistic references to it.

All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, and

other minority groups from the region who together represent 60% of California's Middle Eastern population and have asked for inclusion. In order for the curriculum to avoid an essentialist understanding of Arabs and the Middle East, and in order to be well balanced, each group should be equally and equitably represented in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum.

I would like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson plan, "Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews" produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, as it will provide students with high-quality instruction on contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience.

The ESMC should make clear that under the "broadly defined umbrella of Asian Studies" are Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent ~60% of CA's MENA population. California Department of Education's Chapter 3 agrees: appropriate topics in the Asian section of Ethnic Studies courses are "the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners."

Thank you for your effort and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dyanna Loeb