



February 26, 2021

To California State Board of Education Members:

Next month you will be tasked with approving an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) with the aim of helping California students become engaged and empathetic global citizens.

We, representing our Nation's prominent Jewish institutions, join 15,000 members of the public in expressing our gratitude for the Instructional Quality Commission's (IQC) recommendation that the State Board of Education include the "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans" lesson in the ESMC.

We ask that you:

1. Approve the IQC's recommendation to include the "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans" lesson in the ESMC, and
2. Place this lesson in the ESMC's Asian American Studies section.

The ESMC appropriately includes Judaism in its list of major South Asian religions and designates antisemitism a form of oppression in its guiding principles.

The South Asian section now addresses xenophobia and Islamophobia with nuance (lessons 33-35). The Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies section will be greatly enriched if it includes this lesson on antisemitism, pairing shared struggles against hate so this section also aligns with the ESMC's thematic approach.

This lesson gives a voice to a large and vital part of California's diverse ethnic population -- South Asian (Middle Eastern) Jewish Americans also known as Mizrahi Jews. After living in Asia for millennia, they arrived on our shores fleeing antisemitism, marginalization, and state-sanctioned discrimination. Over 200,000 live in our state including Iranian Jews, one of the world's largest Middle Eastern diasporic communities.

Antisemitic crimes, still the most prevalent religious-based hate crime in the United States and California, are increasing – now comprising [68% of all religious-based California hate crimes targeting the Jewish 2% of the population](#). Disturbing in its scale, yet only half in our Nation know that antisemitism exists. The ESMC will correct that for this generation. \*

Governor Newsom's vision for this important project is clear -- the ESMC must "[achieve\[\] balance, fairness and \[be\] inclusive of all communities](#)."

We are grateful for the progress that's been made toward Governor Newsom's aims. His vision of a California for All will be advanced by your vote in March to include this lesson in the ESMC's Asian American Studies section aside its current content on other Middle Eastern ethnic groups and religions (more than 60% of California's Middle Eastern-American population is non-Arab, the majority being Jewish-Americans).

Thank you.

Anti-Defamation League  
American Jewish Committee  
Iranian American Jewish Federation  
JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa  
Progressive Zionists of California  
Progressive Zionist Union (PZU)  
Sephardic Education Center  
Stand With Us  
Zioness

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom  
Brooks Allen, Executive Director to State Board of Education  
Superintendent Tony Thurmond

Chief Deputy Superintendent Stephanie Gregson

\* This lesson includes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Written two decades ago by an apolitical body of world scholars, policy experts, and researchers, it is championed and embraced by President Biden and now the most authorized and internationally accepted definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition is also recommended by the UN Secretary General, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (made up of 34-member countries including the US), and European Parliament. It has been adopted in almost 30 nations and by representative religious bodies including the [Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations](#) and Global Imams Council. Three hundred and two members of the U.S. House of Representatives used the IHRA definition in the Never Again Education Act, co-sponsored by 45 Representatives from California including Jackie Speier, Ro Khanna, Ted Lieu, Barbara Lee, Zoe Lofgren, Anna Eshoo and Adam Schiff.