

From: Howard Chabner

Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2020 3:51 PM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>; [emails redacted]; Tony Thurmond [email redacted]; COMMUNICATIONS [emails redacted]

Cc: [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum continues to be problematic, including with respect to Jews and Israel

To Governor Gavin Newsom, US Senator Dianne Feinstein, US Senator Kamala Harris, State Senator Scott Wiener, Assembly Member David Chiu, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, and the California Department of Education:

Many high school students lack critical thinking skills. Many lack knowledge of historical facts such as the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the millions killed by Mao in the Cultural Revolution, the millions killed by Stalin, and the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. Many don't know about the Civil Rights movement in the US. Many have a poor knowledge of geography, science and mathematics. I suggest that instead of requiring a specific ethnic studies curriculum of the type proposed, increased emphasis be placed on critical thinking, basic historical facts, geography, science and mathematics.

Inclusion, diversity, and understanding the unique history, contributions and struggles of various ethnic groups are essential. However, even as revised, the proposed ESMC seems polemical and concerned with political correctness, and it steers students toward a particular viewpoint instead of presenting them with facts and asking them to examine those facts critically and draw their own conclusions.

The revised proposed ESMC is anti-capitalistic. Instead of teaching students about different economic systems, including those which existed in the past, it simplistically blames capitalism for racism.

None of the four ethnic groups to be studied includes European ethnic groups such as Irish, Italians, Poles, Greeks and others. Each of these groups has made unique and important contributions to America, and each has experienced discrimination. Each is worthy of study in an ethnic studies curriculum.

The revised proposed ESMC views the successes and integration of Irish and Jews in America as related to the redefining of white, positing that Irish and Jews were initially not considered white, and later came to be considered white. This is simplistic and reductionist; it incorrectly sees all discrimination as based on actual, perceived or putative skin color. It ignores the complexity and specificity of discrimination.

The revised proposed ESMC and supplemental materials are still deeply problematic with respect to Jews and Israel.

- They fail to adequately recognize that Judaism is an ethnicity, not only a religion. The Jews are a people.

- They fail to adequately discuss the contribution of Jews to American culture, politics, economics, medicine, science, the arts, education and other fields.
- They fail to adequately discuss anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism today is rampant in California, throughout the US, and worldwide, and it has increased in recent years. As just one example, recall that the torch-six bearing white supremacists marching in Charlottesville chanted "Jews will not replace us."
- They characterize American Jews mainly in the context of how some have secured white privilege, which is misleading.
- They ignore the experience of a significant part of the Jewish community, including Middle Eastern and North African Jews, as well of other Jews of Color.
- They still open the door for anti-Israel content. It appears that a discussion of BDS was eliminated from the revised draft because of technical issues, not because of a recognition that BDS seeks to delegitimize Israel. Moreover, discussion of the conflict between Arab countries and Palestinians, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other, should be tangential, at most, in a study of ethnicities. And certainly the curriculum should not take sides in this conflict.

Numerous Jewish groups and leaders have made detailed critiques of the revised proposed ESMC as it relates to Jews and Israel.. They include major Jewish Community Relations Councils; Sarah Levin, executive director of JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa; and Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, co-founder and director of the AMCHA Initiative.

The Academic Engagement Network has made detailed critiques of various problems with the revised proposed ESMC.

There have also been problems with the process – last-minute revisions were made, and transparency was reduced.

The California Department of Education (including its committees, advisory boards and the like) needs to go back to the drawing board.

California is often at the forefront of movements, innovations, ways of living, ideologies etc. California influences the entire United States. What California does matters.

Governor Newsom, please do not sign AB 331, AB 1460 or similar legislation until the proposed ESMC and supplemental materials are significantly revised. State Senator Weiner and Assembly Member Chiu, please request that the California Department of Education further revise the proposed ESMC. Superintendent Thurmond, please ensure that the ESMC is further revised to take into account the issues raised in this email and by so many others.

Thank you for considering this email

Sincerely
Howard Chabner