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September 30, 2020

Re: Revised Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Superintendent Thurmond, Dr. Gregson, and Members of the IQC:

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) submits this comment for the [second field review of the ESMC](#). We urge you to adopt the following revisions and inclusions:

- 1. Ensure that students learn to combat bias, bigotry and racism by including a meaningful lesson plan about antisemitism, utilizing the most commonly accepted definition – the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition – which has been internationally adopted and endorsed by both the U.S. State Department and U.S. Department of Education.**

As we submitted to the California Department of Education in our letter of March 23, 2020 (and resubmitted as an attachment at the end of this letter), we urge you to include the most authoritative and widely-accepted definition of antisemitism, developed in 2005 by the European Union (Agency: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia), and later adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an organization made up of 34 member countries including the US, and since endorsed by the Obama administration's US State Department, the US Department of Education, the Secretary-General of the Organization for American States which includes almost all the countries in the Western Hemisphere, the European Parliament, organizations monitoring antisemitism and many others. This is the definition in the United States House of Representatives' Never Again Education Act (H. R. 943) co-sponsored by 302 representatives including 45 from California such as Jackie Speier, Ro Khanna, Ted Lieu, Barbara Lee, Zoe Lofgren, Anna Eshoo and Adam Schiff:

*"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."*¹

Antisemitism is rising across the country, and in California, Jews are the number one target of religious based hate crimes and the number three target of all ethnic based hate crimes.² Jews are an ethnic group that has historically faced intense discrimination and genocide. This ethnic studies curriculum – designed to combat discrimination and racism – must also include lesson materials about antisemitism.

¹ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

² <https://oag.ca.gov/hatecrimes>.



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- 2. Include the history and experience of ethnic groups – such as Jews, Hindus, Koreans, Armenians and others who have been left out of the curriculum – consistent with a comprehensive ethnic studies approach.**

We support the ESMC effort to fully address the historic and present-day experience of African American, Asian American, Chicano and Latino and Native Americans. This is especially so given the past and ongoing experience of these groups with systemic racism and marginalization, including in mainstream high school curricula. But, fully addressing these issues should not come at the expense of, and by marginalizing, other ethnic groups. As AB 2016 so clearly states, the broader term “ethnicity” (not just race or skin color) should be the criteria used when deciding which groups to feature in the ESMC. AB 2016 calls for the state’s educational standards to be “guided by core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations” and notes the objective of preparing pupils “with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures.”

The California Department of Education has proposed the more narrow “critical ethnic studies” focus on four core groups of people of color: African Americans; Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x; Native Americans; and Asian-Americans. Yet the Asian-American section is broadly construed to include lesson plans about a diverse range of groups, including Arab Americans. Given this paradigm, the curriculum arguably should also include the experiences of other Asian ethnic groups, such as Hindus and Koreans. Middle Eastern communities, such as the Coptic, Bahai, Mizrahi Jewish, Assyrian, Iranian, Kurdish and Yazidi students, together constitute a sizeable Middle Eastern demographic in California yet are entirely erased in the curriculum. We therefore recommend the addition of the submitted JIMENA lesson plan be added to Appendix B under the Asian-American section.

- 3. Ensure that instructional materials present fair and balanced academic presentations of various points of view, rather than partisan political ideology. Include the [Balanced Curriculum Guidelines](#) from the Los Angeles Unified School District’s Ethnic Studies programs. Remove material that promotes radical ideological aims, such as “transformative post-imperial resistance” driven by the “Guiding Values,” woven throughout the lesson plans. Instead, align lessons to the [“Eight Outcomes” for Ethnic Studies](#) which promote values such as mutual respect, understanding of others and self-empowerment for civic engagement.**
- 4. RESPECT THE RULE OF LAW AND ADHERE TO PRINCIPLES OF TRANSPARENCY. We have written to you on several previous occasions about the procedural irregularities and lack of transparency, including the last-minute additions announced on August 12. We urge the state to implement a fair procedural review and release all aspects of the curriculum now.**



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The CDE does not plan to release additional material (such as the Arab American lesson plan) until November. According to a correspondence with Dr. Gregson on August 17th, there will not be sufficient time (45 days) for the IQC to review this material after the requisite 45-day public comment period. Rather, the CDE will compile all of the public comments and make recommendations directly to the State Board of Education for final review at their March meeting.

Given the degree of controversy and public interest in this curriculum, we urge that the required and necessary process of review not be subverted.

K-12 students across California deserve an opportunity to honestly confront racism in all its forms, build bridges of interethnic understanding, and see themselves in the curriculum. The present draft falls far short. Please help get the final version right.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Serena Eisenberg".

Serena Eisenberg
AJC Northern California Director

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard S. Hirschhaut".

Richard S. Hirschhaut
AJC Los Angeles Director



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March 23, 2020

Dear Superintendent Tony Thurmond, Chief Superintendent Stephanie Gregson, Instructional Quality Commission Chair Jose Iniguez, and Instructional Quality Commission Executive Director Shanine Coats,

Thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of students and families across our state as you address the many challenges Coronavirus poses for California's students and administrators.

We are sharing the following in advance of the upcoming Instructional Quality Commission meeting on the California Department of Education's recommended changes to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC).

As you may know, **antisemitic hate crimes are rising dramatically in California, a 21% uptick last year alone, with Jews the most frequent religious and 3rd most frequent ethnic hate crime target in our state[i]** so it is imperative that the ESMC include a definition of antisemitism.

We urge you to use the most widely-accepted definition of antisemitism, developed in 2005 by the European Union (Agency: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia), and later adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an organization made up of 34 member countries including the US, and since endorsed by the Obama administration's US State Department, the US Department of Education, the Secretary-General of the Organization for American States which includes almost all the countries in the Western Hemisphere, the European Parliament, organizations monitoring antisemitism and many others:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." [ii]

This is the definition in the United States House of Representatives' Never Again Education Act (H. R. 943) co-sponsored by 302 representatives including 45 from California such as Jackie Speier, Ro Khanna, Ted Lieu, Barbara Lee, Zoe Lofgren, Anna Eshoo and Adam Schiff.

Governor Gavin Newsom, concerned about the rise in antisemitism in California, apologized for the first draft ESMC's erasure of the Jewish community citing the recent antisemitic-fueled murder and attempted mass murder of Poway's Jewish residents and children in his own son's school expressing hatred of Jews. [iii] Superintendent Thurmond, you agreed: "Acts of hate are happening against the Jewish people. They must be included." [iv] The intent of former Assembly member Alejo, the sponsor of AB 2016's Ethnic Studies model curriculum bill, is clear: California's children need to "gain a deeper understanding of ...their neighbors." This, he said, includes "Jewish Americans." [v]

Antisemitism's dramatic resurgence has prompted international organizations to disseminate reports to educational institutions worldwide. [vi] Working under the mandate of the United Nation's Human Rights Council, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religions or Belief Ahmed Shaheed issued "Combating Antisemitism to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief." In it, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres notes that antisemitism "threatens all people's human rights" and "where there is antisemitism, there are likely to be other discriminatory ideologies and forms of bias." [vi] UNESCO's "Addressing antisemitism through education: guidelines for policymakers" explains that contemporary "anti-Semitism threatens the realization of all people's human rights and the overall security of states where it occurs." This international authority, along with others, caution that education about the Holocaust, while important, is not an adequate substitute for education that aims to prevent anti-Semitism. [vii]



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We appreciate your assurances that the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum will be an important tool to address anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice. Left unaddressed, all forms of anti-Semitism undermine democratic values and feed violent extremism. And so, we urge you to adopt this widely accepted definition of antisemitism in the Model Curriculum, and stand ready to provide additional resources and educational materials.

Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you for your attention and consideration. And we hope that you continue to stay well and continue to provide needed leadership in the face of these unprecedented challenges.

Sincerely,

Serena Eisenberg
 AJC Northern California Director

Richard S. Hirschhaut
 AJC Los Angeles Director

cc. State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond
 Senator Ben Allen (Legislative Jewish Caucus)

Hate Crime Statistics

<u>Overall Hate Crimes</u> (2018) (Top 5)		<u>California</u>	<u>US</u>
		#1 Anti-Black 26% of total	#1 Anti-Black 27% of total
		#2 Anti-Gay (male) 16% of total	#2 Anti-Jewish 12% of total
		#3 Anti-Hispanic 14% of total	#3 Anti-White 11% of total
		#4 Anti-Jewish 12% of total	#4 Anti-Gay (male) 10% of total
		#5 Anti-White 4.5% of total	#5 Anti-Hispanic 7% of total
<u>Religious-Based Hate Crimes (RBHC)</u> (2018)	<u>% of CA Population</u>		
Anti-Jewish	2%	#1 – up 21% from 2017 126 incidents 63% of total RBHC	#1 – down 11% from 2017 835 incidents 58% of total RBHC
Anti-Muslim	1%	#3 – down 39% from 2017 28 incidents 14% of total RBHC	#2 – down 31% from 2017 188 incidents 13% of total RBHC
Anti-Sikh			#3 60 incidents 4% of total RBHC
Other (not Xian or above)	~11%	#2 30 incidents 15% of total RBHC	



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California

Hate Crimes: <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/Hate%20Crime%20In%20CA%2020190701.pdf>
Religion Demographics: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/california/>

US

Hate Crimes: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2018-hate-crime-statistics-released-111219> and <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2018/downloads/downloads> Religion Demographics: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

[i] <https://oag.ca.gov/hatecrimes>.

[ii] <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

[iii] <https://www.jweekly.com/2019/08/23/in-face-to-face-with-gov-newsom-strong-support-for-jewish-concerns/>

[iv] <https://www.jweekly.com/2019/08/14/jews-must-be-included-in-ethnic-studies-curriculum-says-state-schools-chief-at-press-conference/>

[v] Letter to Governor Brown (August 30, 2016) and Superintendent Thurmond (August 15, 2019).

[vi] UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religions or Belief Ahmed Shaheed, "Combating Antisemitism to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief" https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A_74_47921ADV.pdf (September 23, 2019)

[vii] <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702> (2018). ("Educators must play a central role...Education about the Holocaust, while important, is not an adequate substitute for education that aims to prevent anti-Semitism...")