

The California Department of Education received more than 500 submissions that contained the text below. Other identical comments may have been posted separately.

From: Rajanpreet Pannu
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 7:44 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Stop Ignoring Sikhs in Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear California Department of Education,

On March 31, 2020, the Sikh Coalition and the Jakara Movement submitted a series of specific recommendations for the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to ensure accurate and meaningful representation of the Sikh community in the curriculum. This was accompanied by a letter from 52 California gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship) supporting these requested changes. None of these changes were taken on board or effected in the second draft of the Model Curriculum. In fact, none of the recommendations ever received a formal response or any indication that they were even seriously considered as part of the 2020 review process.

The latest draft strips away multiple mentions of the Sikh community and its rich, century-old contributions to California to a single story in the context of discrimination in the aftermath of 9/11. Sikhs should be mentioned here because it is absolutely true that there has been a rising number of bias, bullying, and hate crimes against Sikhs in California (according to the Sikh Coalition, since 2015 no other state has had more anti-Sikh hate crimes in the nation). However, Sikhs must also be equally recognized for the work that has been done to counter the rise of xenophobia in California. Singly encountering the Sikh community only through the lens of victimization results in the continued flattening and dehumanization of our communities.

Sikhs have a large population in the state, numbering approximately 250,000 and a significantly high density in the K-12 student population in more than 20 of California's public school districts (Yuba City Unified and Central Unified have more than 12 percent, and Punjabi is the third most commonly spoken language in the Central Valley). Given this magnitude and concentration of the Sikh population in California, our powerful immigration stories, our immensely positive contributions to the state for more 125 years, and our involvement in anti-racist and anti-colonialist movements, it is imperative that we are also included in a positive way which highlights our unique stories and contributions in a distinct context--not in comparison to other communities. Such minimal representation would result in further marginalization and misunderstanding of the Sikh community.

Our recommendations:

1. Insert a lesson plan about the Sikh community (which falls under the discipline of Asian

American studies), in order to ensure that meaningful teaching about Sikhism will actually reach classrooms. The lesson plan can be found in the original letter of recommendations and edits.

2. Reconvene the original committee of writers and experts of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and include the Sikh community as a stakeholder in this process.

3. Maintain the integrity of the Ethnic Studies framework with disciplinary knowledge, language, and pedagogy.

The decision to ask individual schools and school districts to choose which communities to include--as opposed to laying out a strong, detailed curriculum with many specific examples--will mean that teaching about Sikhism will continue to be ignored in most classrooms across the state. This will have devastating long-term repercussions for the California Sikh community in our shared efforts to educate all Californians about the history and contributions of communities that make our state great.

The CDE and IQC must stop ignoring the requests of the Sikh community and address our concerns. We are committed to working with the CDE and IQC as a stakeholder in the process for more meaningful and accurate representation of the Sikh community in the curriculum.

Regards,

Regards,
Rajanpreet Pannu
[address redacted]
Morristown, NJ