

**From:** Wendy Greenfield  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 7:45 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] South Bay Jewish Voice for Peace Opposition to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Tony Thurmond

State Superintendent, CA Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: South Bay Jewish Voice for Peace OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC**

January 19, 2021

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of the South Bay Chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, I am writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not live up to the values, principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.” We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

As an organization that prioritizes the values of diversity and anti-racism, we know that Ethnic Studies is foundational to the education of our youth and the creation of a just society. Our organization works to support a just solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. We know that our society has historic anti-Arab prejudice. These prejudices are constantly at play when governments and legislatures deal with this issue. It is important not only for the well-being and healthy identity of Arab-American students, but for other students and ultimately for world peace that the cultural and historical backgrounds of Arab-Americans, including Palestinian-Americans, be taught in our schools.

We are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators: We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied.

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- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that

- align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
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- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American
- Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
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As a Jewish-American organization, we are also quite concerned that an incorrect definition of antisemitism is included in a lesson plan about Jews. This definition, known as the IHRA - International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, includes criticism of Israel as one type of antisemitism. This should be totally removed from the curriculum. Criticism of any government is essential in order to correct wrongdoing, and the state of Israel is no exception to that. Many Jews and Jewish organizations have criticized their treatment of Palestinian citizens and those who live in areas occupied by the Israeli army. This is not antisemitism, it is people speaking their conscience.

At a time when the rise of rightwing antisemitism is so evident in our country, it is important to explain what antisemitism is - the hatred and stereotyping of Jews. It is important to distinguish between this and legitimate criticism of another country.

Sincerely,

Wendy Greenfield, Chair

South Bay Jewish Voice for Peace