

From: Ilya Gontar
Sent: Wednesday, August 7, 2019 10:43 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Public Comment: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear CA Department of Education Ethnic Studies Public Comment,

I am writing regarding California's Department of Education Instructional Quality Commission's proposed ethnic studies model curriculum.

As requested by your public comment form, I have concerns with the following content:

The glossary for the curriculum includes a definition of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against Israel. It claims the purpose of BDS is to, "establish freedom for Palestinians living under apartheid conditions".

It then parrots more BDS talking points while offering no critical perspectives about this campaign of hate, which seeks to end Israel's existence.

This definition is not only entirely one-sided but its inclusion elevates a fringe perspective against Israel into the mainstream and entirely politicizes the national origin of a major California community of Israeli-American immigrants. No other nation or national origin is subject to the same treatment in the model curriculum. Most disturbingly, the model curriculum's definition of BDS in its current form is akin to defining the Ku Klux Klan as a social movement that promotes free speech and free expression while ignoring the organization's racist underpinnings.

The sample lesson plans for the curriculum:

Encourage teachers to highlight BDS and a pro-BDS group called Direct Action for Palestine, but no voices critical of their perspectives (p. 234).

Promote a false equivalence between Israel's efforts to stop terrorists from entering communities to murder innocent people, and U.S. policies on the border with Mexico (p. 234).

Use unclear language that implies "Israel-Palestine" as a whole is an Arab country (p. 237).

Frame the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 War as fact, with no alternative perspectives (p. 242).

Encourage teachers to use a poem featuring harsh criticism of Israel, but no content offering a positive perspective about Israel or criticism of Palestinian leaders (p. 256, 264-269).

The Introduction of the proposed curriculum states that, "The implementation of Ethnic Studies presents an opportunity for teachers to... enable students to develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism." Despite this stated goal, the curriculum does not feature a single lesson about the Jewish community, mentioning Jews only in passing. With antisemitism rising and ignorance about the Jewish people still a major problem in our society, the exclusion of Jews from this curriculum is deeply disappointing.

We respectfully request that the proposed ethnic studies curriculum take California's diverse communities and perspectives into account through a revision of the current model. Drawing from your own glossary, the "master narrative" advanced in the current model curriculum only serves to marginalize and disenfranchise California's immigrant population from Israel and this is not acceptable.

I also want to thank the California legislature, in particular, the California Legislative Jewish Caucus for their time and attention on this matter.

Regards,
Ilya Gontar
Los Angeles, CA