

From: Eli Kia
Sent: Tuesday, September 29, 2020 4:07 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter from Jewish Students

Hello,

My name is Eli Kia and I am a Persian Jewish student. I am emailing you to share an open letter from Jewish high school students and allies from across California regarding the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. This letter is signed by over 350 students and urges you to teach about antisemitism in all its forms, represent the full diversity of the Jewish community, and include a lesson plan about Middle Eastern communities, including Jews in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. You can read the letter below or at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/esmcrevisionsletter>

Dear members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

We are Jewish high school students and non-Jewish student allies from across California, writing to share our feedback about the new draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). We come from diverse backgrounds, including Persian Jews, Latinx Jews, Black Jews, Sephardi Jews, Mizrachi Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Israeli Jews, Jews from the former Soviet Union, and more.

We wholeheartedly support an ESMC that centers the African American, Asian American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, and Native American communities. Now more than ever, we believe in high school ethnic studies courses as a way to empower students, build understanding, and eradicate racism.

We also appreciate some of the new references to Jewish Americans in the ESMC. A major goal of ethnic studies is for students from underrepresented groups to see their histories and experiences reflected in the classroom. Especially given the rise of antisemitism in high schools, this should apply to diverse Jewish students like us.

Far too many of us have faced anti-Jewish hatred. Antisemitic incidents in high schools across California include [swastikas drawn on high school buildings](#), [Nazi songs sung by school sports teams](#), and [Nazi salutes at parties](#). In the bigger picture, the Jewish community in Poway was attacked by a white

supremacist terrorist last year and [antisemitism continues to rise](#) in our state. Learning about antisemitism in all its forms is [crucial to building a full understanding](#) of racism and discrimination in America.

We are relieved to know that openly anti-Israel and antisemitic content has been removed from the ESMC. It was deeply disturbing for many of us to be faced with the threat of such hatred and bias being taught in our schools. That said, we are still very concerned that the “Guiding Values and Principles” in Chapter 1 of the ESMC will be used to justify promoting anti-Zionism, BDS, and one-sided narratives against Israel within ethnic studies courses.

For example, Guiding Value and Principle #6 is to “connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels”. This could be applied in a way that is empowering and educational for us and our peers. Unfortunately, due to confusion about the harmful goals and impacts of anti-Zionism and BDS, it could also be applied in a way that leads to attacks on our identities. This would be a clear violation of Guiding Value and Principle #1: “cultivate empathy... self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants”. We urge you to clarify this section and include strong guidelines about fostering critical thinking, rather than one-sided political advocacy, division, and hate.

Beyond the issue of antisemitism, we believe learning about the Jewish community in its full diversity would add value to ethnic studies courses. The new draft of the ESMC should be revised so that references to Jews reflect our different identities and experiences. This means adding the stories of Jewish refugees and immigrants from the Arab world, Iran, Israel, Central and South America, and the former Soviet Union. The experiences of Jews of color are essential to include as well. Our identities prove that ethnicity and identity are not monolithic and we hope this is reflected in ethnic studies courses across California.

Lastly, although this may not be the intent, we find the following language in Chapter 3 offensive and exclusionary, in regards to Asian American Studies: “Topics may include.. the unique experiences of Arab Americans and other Middle Easterners”.

Mizrahi Jews, Iranians, Kurds, Assyrian-Christians, Coptic-Christians, Yezidis, Baha'is, and Zoroastrians [represent](#) “an estimated combined total population of over 500,000, or at least 60%, of the Middle Eastern diasporic population in California”. Many of us come from one or more of these communities. We and our peers from other Middle Eastern groups deserve to be included as equals with Arab Americans, rather than having our unique identities erased or ignored. This applies to Asian American Studies units and the curriculum as a whole.

As students, we and our younger siblings are the ones who will be most deeply affected by the decisions you make about the ESMC. We deeply appreciate your time and consideration of our input on this vitally important issue.

Sincerely,

Lori Allison
Sara Amar
Jasmine Amin
Natalie Arbatman
Natania Aslmand
Shabnam Azizi
Davina Azizzadeh
Meshi Ben
Aaron Benyamini
Gila Braun
Janice Brenman
Talia Byrnes
Lynda Chan
Jesse Chavez
Livia Cherry
Ava Cherry
Adam Cohen
Lionel Dahan
Sarah Lea Dahan
Ariel Dardashti
Etai Dayani
Tiffany Dayani
Netanel Dimenstein
Abi Erle

Ari Feinsmith
Sydney Fener
Bitá Firoozmand
Rachel Galas
Alexander Goldbloom
Eyal Green
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Shiva Habibzadeh
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Ethan Hamid
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Ilan Horn
Jacob Horn
Rebecca Houriani
Vardit Jan-Engel
Sharona Kahen
Mika Kantor
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Dov Koskas
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Alin Lansky
Dan Lehavi
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Jacob Shak
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Rebecca Shalom
Sahar Shaouljian
Sandy Shohed
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Ellia Torkian
Sepideh Vahedi
Laura Wachal
Harrison Wechsler
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Michelle Yasharpour
Ramona Yedidsion
Elena Yeshoua
Danielle York
Anita Yossian
Eve Zanani
Sepi Zarrabi
Meriel Zeltzer
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Dylynn Fuentes
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Yeji Kim
Dari Thiongo
Ephraim Shalunov
Rhyan Wilson
Diane Murphy
Michael Miller
Dana Worrell
Dylynn Fuentes
Mia Dunbar
Lauren Pak
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Aaron Newnan
Kate Dimick
Nicole Newman
Eden Yadegar
Kate Van de bunt
Maddy Coddling
Nicole Newman
Laura Garcia
Benji Himmel
Payman Danielpour
Lilly Waters
Molly Hoffman
Peyman Yadegar
Sep Dardashti
Amir Ohebsion
Rafi Ohebsion
Gaby Newman

Foujan Tolouee
Zachary Patterson
Dory Barkhordar
Kia Khoshbin
Amir Ohebsion
Elisa Kim
Avi Yroshalmiane
Bob Sarraf
Poya Yaeger
Harrison Wechsler
Alessandra Judaken
Michael Burg
Peyman Yadegar
Ben Neilan
Elena Maya
Israel Maya
Hillary Altes
Avi Yroshalmiane
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Ella Teich
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Savannah Scott
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Danielle Lewis
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Noam Emerson-Fleming
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Elijah Harbut
Jacob Rodier
Shira Shabtian
Brooke Wahlund
Michelle Kogan
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Shai Emanuel Yamin
Shantel Salemnia
Esther Toron
Tal Harris
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Melanie Kallah
Noa Brand
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Alexia Beller
Tess Carrier
Alec Polur
Romi Veinbergs
Shira Vilvovsky
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Nico Nassiri
Pamela Pignataro
Ariella Youssefyeh
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Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you!

Best,



Eli Kia