

**From:** Rabbi Josh Berkenwald  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 9:08 AM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** [email redacted]  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Concerns about the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

I appreciate some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), but I am concerned by the imposition of the offensive, one-sided political ideology that still remains in this second draft of California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I have been the Rabbi of Congregation Sinai, a diverse synagogue in San Jose made up of Jewish Californians of many different backgrounds, for over 13 years. The prospect of classes that would foster divisiveness between ethnic groups, and specifically target Jews, has created much fear and anxiety in my community. I do not think that is the intention of AB 2016.

Here are some of my major concerns:

- 
- The second draft does not prevent the teaching of offensive and politically indoctrinating
- and anti-Israel elements from ESMC's first draft. For example, while explicitly antisemitic slurs were removed from the ESMC main document, anti-Zionist references remain in footnotes, links, and the bibliography.
- 
- 
- The few references to Jews are misleading. I urge you to add a definition of antisemitism
- to address its various (and recently increasing) contemporary manifestations, including stereotyping and double standards against Jews and Jewish institutions from all parts of the political spectrum.
- 
- 
- The ESMC Guiding Principles need revision, as they are partly based on the book
- *Education at War*,
- which encourages "solidarity" and "linkages" with BDS, and anti-Israel narratives, harmful to many Jewish students. As an alternative,
- 
- [Elements of Balanced Curriculum](#) from the LA Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Curriculum would provide solid ground rules for course development and would be much more in keeping with the goals of AB 2016.

- 

I urge you to make significant further revisions to the ESMC to address these concerns. Please revise the Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC to use more precise and inclusive terminology, to align with the ESMC Guidelines, to build bridges of intergroup understanding, and to ensure critical thinking. Then adjust the lessons and sample topics accordingly to match the revised principles.

L'Shalom (In Peace),  
Rabbi Josh Berkenwald

Congregation Sinai, San Jose, CA