

From: Inessa Golbraikh
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 7:04 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: [emails redacted]
Subject: CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

I, Inessa Golbraikh, appreciate some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), but I am deeply upset by the imposition of an offensive, one-sided political ideology that still remains in the proposed draft of the ESMC.

Here are my major concerns:

1. ESMC guiding values and principles need revision because they are the basis of each unit and
 - do not reflect California's shared values, nor the values laid out in AB 2016
 - advocate a narrow political philosophy
 - establish an "us vs them" agenda
2. Instead of representing an idea of a dynamically evolving society being the first one in the World who made freedom institutionalized and turned to be a great example to the other countries, the history has been described as perpetual discrimination and oppression. All these dark periods did take place in our history and shouldn't be silenced. These periods should be thoroughly assessed. The goal of education is to teach kids thinking and be tolerant to different opinions. Instead of blaming sides, let's try to discuss with kids why and how the "bad" things could happen in this country? Do we experience the same problems now? What changes did our society go through? What was done right and what can be done better? The society has to learn from its past, not to erase history and culture. American history has been and still is a unique journey made by people setting up big goals, facing challenges, making wrong and right choices and learning from their mistakes. I raised my children in respect to this country, to our police, and to people no matter what skin color they had. Since my kids were in preschool, they have been raised in the atmosphere of tolerance and inclusion. In Palo Alto we have never faced or witnessed any discrimination and/or bullying towards people of color at school. Our society is highly diversified. However, practically each lesson of the offered ESMC represents US as the country of (intentionally demonized) bad-white-men discriminating against people of color. Redlining and other policies which have no place in our society anymore, were presented as today's problems which happen frequently.

3. The presented curriculum also contains references to Jews which are misleading and offensive. The narrative uses such expressions as “Jewish privilege” and other divisive language.

I am a Californian parent. I have 2 children and live in Palo Alto. My family is Jewish. I grew up in Russia, a country of a former Soviet Union. Soviet Union was built on principles of dictatorship, discrimination and oppression. In this country people were at risk to be imprisoned or even killed for saying something politically incorrect, for telling a political joke, or for reading banned books. We lived behind the world standards of healthcare and economics, behind the Stone Wall. It was a socialist country based on Marxists theory. This theory turned out to be a big lie resulting in the death of dozens of millions of people and poverty. As Jews, we were not able to learn the history of Israel or Hebrew. The word “Jew” was insulting in the USSR. My 2 grandfathers had been killed by fascists during the World War II; my relatives had been perished during the Holocaust; my grandmother and my father were almost killed by their Ukrainian neighbors in 1944. My grandmother was a single Mom after the war and was working hard all her life until retired being 80 years old! My father has been working at the factory since he was 14. What privilege did my family have? I started my professional life being 17. I came to America, got married and gave birth to my 2 beautiful children. I started volunteering by working with low-income senior citizens on the 3rd day of my arrival. I didn’t earn money that time but I wanted to be of use. Both me and my husband (also an immigrant from Ukraine) worked hard, learnt English and paid taxes. I am a cancer survivor and have a child with special needs. No Jewish privilege helped me avoid these life challenges. Therefore, Anti-Semitic “privilege” statements sound unfair and insulting to all Jewish people respecting the law, working hard and honest to raise our kids in dignity and make America a better place.

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.

Thank you,
Inessa Golbraikh,
Palo Alto