

From: Irene Lefton

Sent: Sunday, August 9, 2020 12:25 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments about my disappointment in the updated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

To the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education:

I am a Jewish Californian who has an interest in what is being taught, especially as I continue to learn myself what the historical impact of how teaching and training lead to systemic racism and other aggressions against various minority groups. I have had a chance to review the updated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). While I appreciate some of the improvements in the ESMC, I am still concerned by the newly proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. My concern stems from my understanding that this second draft has attempted to remove many of the specific references that I previously raised as a concern, however, they seem to still be there only moved to the footnotes, links, and bibliography. This results in less visibility to the details of what will actually be taught which is concerning. It appears to me that the misrepresentation of Jews and the imposition of a one-sided political ideology still remain, as do the same problematic principles and ideological framework from which all lessons are developed. This is a problem.

Thank you for mostly removing explicitly antisemitic slurs from the ESMC and for the addition of guidance for teachers to expose students to "multiple and often competing sources of information" and foster respect for diverse viewpoints. I was also happy to see the inclusion of an identity unit in the instructional guidelines. This is good progress but there are still areas to address before this can be

My specific concerns are many however, here are a few of my major concerns:

- ESMC guiding values and principles need revision because they are the basis of each unit and lesson plan. They do not reflect California's shared values, nor the values laid out in AB 2016. They seem to advocate for a more narrow political philosophy which does not belong in curriculum, especially in Ethnic Studies. Most importantly they establish an "us vs them" agenda which is partly based on the book Education at War, which encourages "solidarity" and "linkages" with the BDS movement, and anti-Israel narratives, harmful to many Jewish students. Ethnic studies are designed to educate to bring people together, NOT to divide them.
- References to Middle Eastern communities should not favor one community over others. This is especially important as we all educate ourselves to Anti-Racism language and theories. One way to address this would be to include the lesson plan, ["Antisemitism as the Middle Eastern-American Jews,"](#) covering contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience produced by the JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa.
- The few references that do exist describing Jews are misleading and offensive. Instead I request that you include Mizrahi and other Jews of color and remove links to, and group advocacy of, virulently anti-Israel pro-BDS sites with malicious slander about imaginary genocide. It would also be very helpful to add a definition of antisemitism that addresses the currently very prevalent sinister stereotyping and double standards against Jews and Jewish institutions from all parts of the political spectrum.

I understand that building a model curriculum is tricky and challenging and also that it is important. I implore you to avoid creating a one sided political ideology that misrepresents Jews and other ethnic groups. As an a California Jew, who cares strongly about education and sees the importance in Ethnic Studies, I fear that the curriculum as it stands plants the seeds of systemic antisemitism and does not meet the objectives set forth in creating this in the first place.

I urge you to make significant revisions of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to address these concerns. Please ALSO 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,

Irene

A lifelong learner and concerned Californian.