

**From:** Meshi Benezri

**Sent:** Thursday, August 15, 2019 6:41 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** From a Concerned California Public High School Student

Hello. My name is Meshi Benezri and I am 17 years old attending a public school in California.

As a California Public School student, I have personally experienced antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel on multiple occasions. I am only beginning my senior year of high school and I have already heard stories from many students about antisemitism that negatively impacted their lives. Fortunately, I have not experienced severe antisemitism, but this still is not acceptable.

Ethnic Studies is an important part of education because it promotes inclusivity, understanding, and equality. The new proposed California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum does not fulfill these goals. It would create a space that would allow room for a rise in hate crimes due to the one-sided bias throughout the proposed curriculum. With regard to Israel/Palestine, both narratives should be taught on an equal playing field, with an emphasis on historical facts.

By only teaching one side of this conflict as the current model curriculum does, every single California Public High school student would leave their classroom believing that the complex situation is black and white.

Regarding the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement (BDS), the given definition in the glossary is not all it claims to be. Once implemented, BDS on the ground does not help the Palestinians or give them the opportunity to thrive.

One example includes, SodaStream, "the Israeli carbonated beverage company [which built a factory in the West Bank and] was employing 1,300 workers. Of that workforce, 350 were Israeli Jews, 450 were Israeli Arabs and 500 were West Bank Palestinians. Management and staff confirmed to [the] reporter that pay and benefits were identical for workers in comparable jobs, irrespective of their citizenship and ethnicity," (timesofisrael.com). BDS launched a ferocious campaign against the Israeli company SodaStream and their factory in the disputed West Bank. However, their purpose claims to 'benefit the Palestinian people', the final result proved to be quite the opposite. BDS accomplished their goal of pressuring SodaStream to move out of the West Bank which ultimately led to hundreds of Palestinians losing their jobs and becoming unemployed. BDS states that their goal is to create equality and justice for Palestinians but it had quite the opposite effect. If every California High School student was to learn the proposed definition of BDS, it would have a very harsh negative impact on Israelis and the Palestinians on the ground, especially in the future generations. It would also make the peace process so much harder. As a diverse and populous state in the United States, we should be teaching the younger generations how to achieve peace through relationships and understanding, something that Sodastream embodies. As a high school student, I am a future peacemaker and our education system should build my peers and me to be so. Promoting BDS encourages violence, not peace.

I am urging that the California Education Department take this into consideration. Implementing this new curriculum would make every single Jew feel inferior and would promote violence in schools against them.

At the end of the day, we have a common goal of wanting to teach the future generations the truth, making them good people, and ensuring everybody's safety in schools. Please help accomplish this goal by changing the new curriculum, educating people about the many voices, and ultimately making sure Jewish students feel comfortable in their learning environments.

Sincerely,

Meshi Benezri

Senior in Irvine, California

## Public Input Template–2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum May 2019 Draft

(Download and use to provide specific recommendations)

Include the chapter of the model curriculum, the page number, and line number(s) to ensure that the California Department of Education and Instructional Quality Commission can reference the content of the document when reviewing your comments. Please email this document as a Word document to [ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov](mailto:ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov). You may contact Kenneth McDonald, Education Programs Consultant, at [kmcdonal@cde.ca.gov](mailto:kmcdonal@cde.ca.gov) with any questions regarding this template or the public input process.

Chapter of Model Curriculum	Your Name and Affiliation	Comment (include page and line numbers where applicable)
Glossary	<b><i>Meshi Benezri Current California Public High School Student</i></b>	<b><i>Page 2, lines 29-40</i></b> – This section features a definition which clearly promotes 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 one-sided BDS talking points, offering no critical perspectives about this campaign of hate, including that its true purpose, as stated by its co-founder and leading activists, is to end the existence of Israel, the only Jewish state.
Chapter 2	<b><i>Meshi Benezri Current California Public High School Student</i></b>	<b><i>Page 234, lines 4956-4958</i></b> – This section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages teachers to highlight BDS and a pro-BDS group called Direct Action for Palestine but no voices critical of their perspectives (p. 234).</li> <li>• Promotes 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.</li> </ul>
Chapter 2	<b><i>Meshi Benezri Current California Public High School Student</i></b>	<b><i>Page 237, lines 5024-5032</i></b> – This section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use unclear language that implies “Israel-Palestine” as a whole is an Arab country.</li> </ul>

# Public Input Template–2019 Health Education Framework

Page 2 of 5

Chapter of Model Curriculum	Your Name and Affiliation	Comment (include page and line numbers where applicable)
Chapter 2	<b>Meshi Benezri</b> <b>Current California Public High School Student</b>	<b>Page 242, lines 5157-5161</b> – This section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frames the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 War as fact, with no alternative perspectives.</li> </ul>
Chapter 2	<b>Meshi Benezri</b> <b>Current California Public High School Student</b>	<b>Page 256, lines 5477-5494, pages 264-270, lines 5692-5830</b> – These sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage teachers to use an anti-Israel poem which insinuates Jews control the media and use it to manipulate the public - a common, and quintessential, antisemitic slur.</li> </ul>
General	<b>Meshi Benezri</b> <b>Current California Public High School Student</b>	The Introduction of the proposed curriculum states that “[t]he 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 or antisemitism, mentioning Jews only in passing. With antisemitism rising and ignorance about the Jewish people still a significant problem in our society, the exclusion of Jews and antisemitism from this curriculum is deeply disappointing and educationally deficient.
General	<b>Meshi Benezri</b> <b>Current California Public High School Student</b>	The biased sections and omissions listed above run counter to the stated purpose of the curriculum, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 1(a): The State of California is committed to providing excellent educational opportunities to all its pupils;</li> <li>Section 1(f): The state’s educational standards should be guided by core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations; and</li> </ul>

## Public Input Template—2019 Health Education Framework

Page 3 of 5

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 1(g): The state is committed to its efforts to provide all pupils with excellent educational opportunities, without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, income, sexual orientation, or disability.</li> </ul> <p>Additionally, California Education Code § 233.5(a) provides:</p> <p>"Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and <i>the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations</i>, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government." (Emphasis added).</p> <p>The rise of antisemitism within our culture, which has been accompanied by an increasing general threat to freedom, human dignity and harmonious relations, is evidenced by the recent attacks of Jews in synagogues in Pittsburgh and Poway, as well as against other American citizens in El Paso and Dayton. The curriculum's failure to address antisemitism as a form of bigotry thus falls short of the above directive.</p> <p>Furthermore, the California Education Code's Prohibition of Discrimination states, in relevant part, that "[n]o person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, <b>race or ethnicity, religion...</b> in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance, or enrolls pupils who receive state student financial aid."</p> <p>Similarly, the California Education Code's Prohibition Instruction includes a provision on <a href="#">Prejudice</a> that states, in relevant part, that "[a] teacher shall not give</p>

# Public Input Template—2019 Health Education Framework

Page 4 of 5

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		<p>instruction and a school district shall not sponsor any activity that promotes a discriminatory bias on the basis of <b>race or ethnicity</b>, gender, <b>religion</b>, disability, nationality, or sexual orientation..." This provision, like the Prohibition of Discrimination mentioned above, illustrates the problems inherent in the proposed curriculum, and are not an exhaustive list of the provisions of the California Education Code with which the proposed curriculum appears to be in conflict.</p> <p>The model curriculum not only fails to address antisemitism as a form of bigotry but actually includes thinly veiled antisemitic rhetoric and promotes the discriminatory BDS movement. Additionally, the model curriculum simultaneously fails to provide balance with regard to Israel or any education at all about Jews. Therefore, it effectively discriminates against Jewish and Israeli students in violation of the education code. Additionally, by marginalizing Jewish and Israeli students, the model curriculum violates the three above-referenced declarations of the California state legislature in enacting the legislation.</p> <p>We note the critical LA Times' review of the curriculum, and hope that the values of inclusion prevail over hatred, division, and misinformation. <b>In closing, we strongly urge you to review and revise the curriculum to remove bias and to educate students about American Jews as an ethnic group, including those who fled the Holocaust, oppression in the Middle East, and discrimination in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, we call on you to create safeguards that will prevent similar bias and omissions in this and other California state curriculums going forward.</b></p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical issue.</p>