

To the California Department of Education, State Board of Education, and members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

We are Jewish high school students and non-Jewish student allies from across California, writing to you in hopes of gaining a better understanding of your plans regarding the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). We come from diverse backgrounds, including Persian Jews, Latinx Jews, Black Jews, Sephardi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Israeli Jews, Jews from the former Soviet Union, and more.

We understand that your urgent priority is dealing with the many challenges COVID-19 poses for our schools and education system, and thank you for your tireless efforts on our behalf. We are sharing our concerns now to give you time to respond ahead of the upcoming Instructional Quality Commission meeting about the ESMC on August 13th.

In its most recent Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Update, the California Department of Education (CDE) wrote that, "Ethnic studies as a whole should represent a broad range of topics, but it must devote a special emphasis to people of color, including their experiences and their important role in our state and national history."

We understand that the CDE is planning to recommend changes that would result in a curriculum that focuses on four groups: African American, Asian American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, and Native American. We wholeheartedly support an ESMC that centers those four communities. Now more than ever, we believe in high school ethnic studies courses as a way to empower students, build understanding, and eradicate racism.

What remains unclear is how the curriculum will also "represent a broad range of topics" and meet previous commitments to add material about the Jewish community and antisemitism. We believe the ESMC can focus on the crucial mission of empowering our peers from the four above-mentioned groups, while also including Jews and other diverse ethnic communities across California.

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, it has been roughly one year since the Jewish community in Poway was attacked by a white supremacist terrorist, 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. Even as we wrote this letter, we witnessed a national controversy about antisemitic rhetoric on social media.

Beyond the issue of antisemitism, we believe learning about the Jewish community in its full diversity would add value to ethnic studies courses. In addition to the Holocaust and early immigration from Europe, schools should teach about 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 cover as well.

Jews are an example of religious and ethnic identity being interconnected. Jewish experiences with oppression, immigration, fighting for human rights alongside other groups, and contributing to American culture have much to offer students of all backgrounds. Our identities prove that ethnicity and identity are not monolithic and we hope that these stories are shared in ethnic studies courses across California.

Given the problems with the first draft, we also believe particular care must be taken to ensure the ESMC does not become a platform to promote hateful campaigns such as the boycott against Israel (BDS), or one-sided political agendas in any form. When the first draft was released, the [LA Times Editorial Board](#) wrote that, "This curriculum feels like it is more about imposing predigested political views on students than about widening their perspectives." As high school students, we expect to be taught how to think, not what to think.

We know that you cannot disclose the specific changes you will be recommending at this stage. That said, we are asking for clarity about the following issues:

- How will you ensure that the ESMC fulfills the broad vision of AB 2016, alongside its crucial emphasis on the African American, Asian American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, and Native American communities?
- Will the ESMC include guidance and resources for teachers in regards to antisemitism and California's diverse Jewish community?
- How will instructional materials about the Jewish community and other communities be vetted, approved, and presented to teachers across the state?
- How will you ensure that the ESMC is not used to promote "predigested political views" or hate, and instead empowers students to understand many different perspectives, think critically, and make up our own minds about controversial issues?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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