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Website: <http://cd5.lacity.org>

Email: Paul.Koretz@lacity.org



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, Fifth District

City Hall Office:
200 N. Spring Street
Room 440
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 473-7005
(213) 978-2250 Fax

Valley Office:
15760 Ventura Blvd.
Suite 600
Encino, CA 91436
(818) 971-3088
(818) 788-9210 Fax

West L.A. Office:
6380 Wilshire Blvd.
Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90048
(323) 866-1828
(323) 852-1129 Fax

August 11, 2020

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Superintendent Thurmond:

I applaud the California Department of Education for making important changes to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), and appreciate the Board's hard work during these trying times. While this new draft of the ESMC is a step in the right direction, I was stunned when I heard that the draft curriculum presented to the Board would openly promote hateful boycotts against Israel and omit anti-Semitism as a form of bigotry. I urge you to make further changes to address these particular shortcomings that remain in the curriculum.

Israel and Jewish students have been the target of biased and unwarranted harassment for the past decade in colleges and high schools. The draft ethnic studies curriculum as proposed would only further the negative rhetoric being used in schools about the history and culture of Israel that often focuses on questioning Israel's right to exist, rather than the Israeli Government's specific policies. The biggest concern regarding the curriculum was the inclusion and promotion of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. BDS advocates claim they are a social movement that aims to establish freedom for Palestinians living in apartheid conditions when, in reality, it only promotes hate and disdain towards Israel. I welcome the news that the Board recognized the short-comings of this draft curriculum and look forward to the ongoing conversation that will ensue.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my concerns and I hope that the removal of lessons regarding BDS and more inclusion of discussions on American Jews will improve upon these anti-Semitic sentiments. It is in our best interest to strive for the equal treatment of all and we hope that your actions will send a similar message.

Sincerely,

PAUL KORETZ

Councilmember, 5th District