

StandWithUs

Supporting Israel And Fighting Antisemitism Around The World

State Board of Education
California Department of Education
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Dear Members of the State Board of Education,

I write on behalf of StandWithUs, an international, non-profit education organization dedicated to educating about Israel and fighting antisemitism. As you prepare to vote on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) on March 17th, we thank you in advance for carefully considering this issue amidst all the challenges facing our education system.

We are reaching out to make you aware of multiple issues we did not include in our original [analysis and recommendations](#) for the 3rd Field Review. Along with our original recommendations, we urge you to take the following concerns into account during the upcoming meeting:

1. We identified additional examples of anti-Israel bias in the ESMC, which should be removed (see Appendix A below).
2. A series of lesson plans titled, “Creating Inclusive and Equitable Communities – A Call to Action,” were submitted for inclusion in the ESMC. While the lessons include valuable educational content, they also cover Jews, antisemitism, and Israel in a way that is problematic. They should not be included in the ESMC in their current form (see Appendix B below).
3. A lesson plan titled, “An Introduction to Arab American Studies,” was submitted for inclusion in the ESMC. While it includes valuable educational content, it also misrepresents Jewish identity and should not be included in its current form. Additionally, it covers the role of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestinian immigration. While there is nothing inherently wrong with that, similar content regarding Jewish refugees from Arab states was removed from JIMENA’s lesson plan. Jews should not be treated unequally or covered in less depth than other groups in the ESMC (see Appendix C below).

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We share this feedback to support your efforts to uphold the vision of AB 2016: “culturally meaningful and relevant curriculum,” educational standards guided by “equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations,” and an, “objective of preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures.” We once again urge you to adopt our [original recommendations](#) and take the new ones into account as you vote on the ESMC.

Thank you for attention to these crucially important matters for our state.

Sincerely,



Roz Rothstein
CEO and Co-Founder
StandWithUs

Cc: Joey Freeman
Jennifer Johnson

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APPENDIX A: New Anti-Israel Bias Found in the ESMC

NOTE: quotes from the ESMC and linked materials are in italics and analysis is in bold below.

Appendix A, Page 538, Lines 11341-11345

"Materials and Resources:

Framework: Jack Shaheen's Reel Bad Arabs

<https://islamophobiaaisracism.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/shaheen-reel-bad-arabs-short.pdf>"

- **The link contains blatantly anti-Israel narratives and should be removed from the ESMC:**
 - *"the state of Israel was founded on Palestinian land."*
 - *"Never do movies present Palestinians as innocent victims and Israelis as brutal oppressors. No movie shows Israeli soldiers and settlers uprooting olive orchards, gunning down Palestinian civilians in Palestinian cities."*
 - *"Dictating numerous Palestinian-as-terrorist scenarios is the Israeli connection. More than half (28) of the Palestinian movies were filmed in Israel. Nearly all of the made-in-Israel films, especially the seven Cannon movies, display violent, sex-crazed Palestinian "bastards [and] animals" contesting Westerners, Israelis, and fellow Arabs. I believe Cannon's poisonous scenarios are not accidental, but rather propaganda disguised as entertainment."*
 - **This last quote is making the same point as an [article](#) Shaheen wrote in 2015, which echoes blatantly antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jews controlling Hollywood.**
 - **If the ESMC is going to cover negative portrayals of Palestinians in Israeli-made films it needs to also cover negative portrayals of Jews in Palestinian and other Arab made films and media.**

Appendix A, Page 542, Line 11399-11402

"The students will also read Suheir Hammad's famous poem, First Writing Since..."

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- The [poem](#) is about 9/11 and contains the line below, which implicitly equates Israelis with the terrorists who carried out the attacks on 9/11. It should be removed from the ESMC.

"if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip."

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APPENDIX B: Review of Submission to the CDE and SBE titled “Creating Inclusive and Equitable Communities – A Call to Action”

NOTE: quotes from the lessons are in italics and analysis is in bold below.

[Intro](#): Creating Inclusive and Equitable Communities

[Lesson 1](#): Introducing Narratives

- *"Among the many detrimental lasting impacts of colonialism, the dominant narratives of non-white groups put forth by European colonizers persist to this day. Since the 16th century, these narratives have been used to justify a global system of racial hierarchy, which privileges white bodies and condemns black and brown bodies. European and American governments have relied on these narratives to justify policies as diverse as slavery, segregation, police violence, **military occupation**, and genocide. This lesson is designed to introduce students to these historical origins of dominant narratives so that they can better understand why these narratives persist today."*
 - **Not clear what they're referring to here since they don't specify, but sounds like an opening to paint Israelis as European colonizers using a "dominant colonial narrative" to justify the occupation.**

[Lesson 2](#): Introducing Dominant Narratives

[Lesson 3](#): Colonial origins of Dominant Narratives

- *"California, despite being a diverse and progressive state, the numbers of victims of hate crimes rose slightly in 2019, with 24% of hate crimes against African Americans; 14% against Jews; 11% against Latinx; 56% against Arabs/Muslims; and 45% against Asians."*
 - **This is inaccurate, the [source](#) they use says the number is around 2%.**

[Lesson 4](#): Connecting Racialization and Racism

- *"The racial categories created under colonialism did not remain static, however. Rather, notions of "whiteness" and "non-whiteness" evolved over time. Consider the experience of Italian, Jewish, and Irish immigrants in the early 19th century. These groups, which are now widely seen as "white," were considered "non-white" by Anglo-Saxon Americans.*

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Once Jews, Irishmen, and Italians were separated from the “purely white” Americans, they were portrayed as dangerous, ill, dirty, and uneducated. This racialization of new immigrant communities worked to justify policies that sought to curb immigration. As new populations immigrated to the United States, groups that were previously seen as “non-white” gradually began to be seen as white as they assimilated into the communities they joined. While Jews, Irishmen, and Italians “became” white...”

- *"How were Italians, Slavs, and Jews perceived when they immigrated to the US in the late 19th to early 20th century? How did their roles change?"*
- *"Why were Italians, Slavs, and Jews considered to be able to “assimilate” but Blacks, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, etc., were not?"*
- *"Racialization is used by those in power to reinforce existing racial hierarchies through policies. Some groups are fluid within the hierarchy. For example, Irish Catholics were once disdained as “others” but are today viewed as white. Jews today are viewed as white, but still discriminated against for their non-Christian faith."*
 - **All of this is oversimplified and problematic, and I know ICS has submitted a [revised version](#) of its lesson plan that addresses these issues in a much more nuanced way.**

[Lesson 5](#): Dominant Narratives in Education

[Lesson 6](#): Dominant Narratives in Media

- *Next, play the short video “[Planet of the Arabs](#),” which shows a compilation of the dominant portrayals of Arabs in Hollywood. (Note: the video contains some graphic violence and inappropriate language. To avoid these scenes, only play the following clips: 0:00-02:45; 04:53-07:05). Ask students to take notes on the “A Guide to Content Analysis” handout (page 7).*
 - **At around 4:18 of the video there's a scene where Israel is called America's best friend, which doesn't appear to talk about Arabs at all. Seems to be gratuitous and an effort to paint support for Israel as inherently anti-Arab.**
 - **4:30-5:20 is all scenes depicting Arab antisemitism or anxiety about it. It's true that there's a false and negative stereotype about all Arabs being antisemitic extremists. It's also true that [numerous studies](#) have [shown](#) Arab states to**

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have by far the highest rates of antisemitic attitudes in the world. It's wrong to present the topic of Arab antisemitism solely as an "anti-Arab stereotype" without having a serious discussion about the broader context. That includes the fact that institutionalized antisemitism exists in the Arab world, having been promoted from the top down by many Arab governments for decades.

- The lesson repeatedly cites Jack Shaheen, who has [accused](#) Israel of manipulating Hollywood in a way that mirrors antisemitic slurs about Jews controlling Hollywood and the media.

[Lesson 7](#): Dominant Narratives in Gov.

[Lesson 8](#): Manifestations of Racism - Interpersonal Racism

[Lesson 9](#): Manifestations of Racism - Structural Racism

- *"How have various groups been impacted by structural racism? (Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, Latinx Americans, Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, Arab or Muslim Americans)"*
- *"Slide 49: Structural Racism Against Jewish Americans..."*
- *"Slide 50: Structural Racism Against Jewish Americans..."*
- *"Slide 51: Structural Racism Against Jewish Americans..."*
- There is too much material to copy here. There is good, accurate material included in these sections along with content that is problematic in various ways:
 - They start the history of antisemitism at the Crusades, which is over 1,000 years too late. Perhaps to avoid acknowledging Jewish roots in Israel? That would need to be fixed to make it more complete.
 - Ironically, they point out something their own lesson is guilty of earlier on: *"In popular culture Jews are often portrayed as a monolithic ethnic or racial group, failing to acknowledge the diversity of Jews in race and ethnicity and in education and financial status."*

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- **They totally avoid mentioning antisemitism that comes from far left and Islamist extremist sources. It is crucial to educate about antisemitism in all its forms, rather than picking and choosing based on politics.**
- *"American foreign policy and media coverage of these stories often show disregard for human rights violations against millions of Muslims in places such as China, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, Kashmir, and Palestine."*
 - **This is a political opinion presented as a fact, with no context. And obviously an opening to promote anti-Israel narratives in a one-sided way in the classroom.**

Lesson 10: Introducing Counter Narratives - Panel of Speakers

- *"College Quarterly, "Voices of the Oppressed and Oppressors First, History and Theory Last" by Fred Ribkoff and Amir Mirfakhraie-*
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1087340.pdf>
 - **Brings up the question, "Do the actions of the Israeli state in the summer of 2014 constitute genocide?" in a strange way, without any other context. Doesn't really support the claim, but seems to go out of its way to put that question in the mind of the reader.**

Lesson 11: Comparing Dominant and Counter Narratives

Lesson 12: Responding to Racism - Individual Action

Lesson 13: Responding to Racism - Collective Action

- **It is important to apply this principle from [LAUSD's ethnic studies curriculum](#) for this lesson: "An ethnic studies course should provide students with depth of understanding in relation to ethnic and social issues, rather than promoting specific political activism, demonstration, protest or the like. Ethnic studies is a scientific inquiry of ethnic groups and their interrelations (Yang, 2010, pg. 14)."**

Lesson 14: Final Reflection

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APPENDIX C: Review of Submission to the CDE and SBE titled “An Introduction to Arab American Studies”

NOTE: quotes from the lessons are in italics and analysis is in bold below.

Page 4: *Map of the Arab world.*

- **The map displays Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza as one unified territory that is all part of the Arab world. This implies a denial of Israel’s existence.**

Page 6: Zeina Azzam Seikaly, “At Risk of Prejudice: The Arab American Community,” *At Risk of Prejudice: The Arab American Community (National Council for the Social Studies)*, accessed February 3, 2021,

<http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/6506/650604.html>.

- **This resource discusses politics surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If this is included, the lesson plans about Jewish Americans should be able to do the same from their own perspective. Otherwise the ESMC will be treating communities unequally.**

Page 7: Next, assign the Introduction and Chapter 1 (pages 1-15) of the short book [Arab Americans: History, Culture, and Contributions](#) for homework to be completed before the first class period dedicated to this lesson.

- **Page 12 of this book frames Jewish communities that live or have lived in the Arab world as “Arab”. In fact, many members of these communities as Mizrahi and/or Sephardic Jews, rather than Arabs. Page 4 of the lesson acknowledges that there are non-Arab ethnic groups in the region but does not mention Jews among them, making this especially problematic.**

Page 8: Next, pass out a copy of the article “[Arab American Stories: History](#)” and the corresponding worksheet [Arab Immigration Timeline](#).

- **The resources mentioned here encourage students to explore the reasons different Arab American communities immigrated to the United States. This includes Palestinians immigrating as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. If such material is included, JIMENA’s lesson plan should include its original content about Jews fleeing**

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oppression or being expelled from Arab states. Otherwise the ESMC will be treating communities unequally.

Page 8: *Show the following clips (00:00-03:06 and 47:23-48:23) of the documentary [Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People](#), which discusses Hollywood's long history of portraying negative stereotypes about Arabs.*

- **The second clip listed says we've unlearned many of our stereotypes about Black, Native American, Jewish, and other communities. This may be misinterpreted as minimizing the ongoing bigotry these communities face, which is rising in some cases.**

Page 9: *Ask students to independently research Arab American advocacy organizations in their communities. For community engagement activities, consider encouraging students to reach out to these organizations to interview them about their efforts, inquire about volunteer opportunities, or write about the achievements of these groups.*

- **This does not align with the standards from Chapter 1 of the ESMC which state "The instruction, material, or discussion must be appropriate to the age and maturity level of the students, and be a fair, balanced, and humanizing academic presentation of various points of view consistent with accepted standards of professional responsibility, rather than advocacy, personal opinion, bias or partisanship."**