

From: Jeffrey Sobel
Sent: Thursday, August 15, 2019 6:52 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: ESMC

To: Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education
From: Jeffrey Sobel

Dear Commission Members:

I have serious reservations about the proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Though I fully recognize the potential value of ethnic studies in public schools, I find that I could not, in good conscience, support the model in its current form without meaningful revisions, as recommended by the California Legislative Jewish Caucus, Stand With Us, Jimena, and Amcha.

As an American citizen, as a follower of the Jewish faith, and as a high school teacher for 37 years in inner-city schools of the L.A. Unified School District, I believe that education is society's best resource for promoting harmony based on mutual respect in our diverse population. Nevertheless, certain glaring omissions and built-in biases in the Curriculum contradict its intention to offer a "balanced" and "inclusive" educational program.

How, for example, can a program so motivated include the struggles of marginalized ethnic groups for social justice without mention of the American Jewish community, whose experience with prejudice is based not only on historical fact but, tragically, on current developments? Is the student to infer, then, that since "marginalized" includes people "of color," Jews are excluded because they are "white" and "privileged"? The weaponizing of identity labels is one pernicious aspect of prejudice and should be challenged even-handedly, no matter who employs these means to advance a self-serving political agenda or narrow mind-set. Thus, the use of "apartheid" in the BDS campaign to condemn Israel's policy toward Palestinians should be as subject to critical scrutiny as the use of "anti-Semitism" to disparage all criticism.

The unintended consequences of a program, however well-meaning, are fearful to contemplate if, in essence, they substitute one set of biases for another, perpetuate stereotypes, narrow rather than enlarge perspectives on complex social issues. Respectfully but urgently, I call on you to "go back to the drawing boards" and renew your best efforts to address these concerns in a revised Curriculum.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Sobel