

August 11, 2020

RE: Native American Studies Segment of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Hello California Department of Education, State Board of Education, Instructional Quality Commission, and State of California

We write to you as Native American/American Indian K-12 teachers, scholars, educators, and tribal citizens regarding the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and specifically to request changes on the “Native American and Indigenous Studies section.” This letter represents our amplified and collective voices responding to the learning of Native American history through the Model Curriculum.

Upon our collective review of the Model Curriculum, it is clear that Native voices, experience, and perspective have been once again silenced--even after Governor Newsom recognized the importance of learning California Indian history in 2019. Even though this curriculum has been touted as providing understanding about our stories, histories, and existence, we write to declare that the current model curriculum falls far short of respectful, culturally appropriate, and acceptable material. We are gravely concerned that accepting the current draft model curriculum continues the Eurocentric narrative that has repeatedly removed our cultural ways of knowing and doing from schools. The reality is that modern-day public schooling in California is historically positioned against our tribal citizens to achieve academic success and to feel a sense of belonging in schools. The draft model curriculum clearly articulates this as acceptable. We write to you today to tell you that this is unacceptable. There are many areas needing attention before a model curriculum can be fully considered.

The “Native American and Indigenous Studies” segment of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is especially grounded in a Eurocentric paradigm. When we reviewed the theoretical underpinnings of the model curriculum, we noticed that Native theoretical frameworks are absent. Thus, the very foundation for which the Native American and Indigenous Studies Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum was built advances a framework which does not include our tribal communities, perspectives, and voices. This second draft significantly worsened.

We request and expect that the following areas be addressed in the next draft of the model curriculum:

- **Remove the words “Indigenous Studies” from the title and replace it with “Native American Studies/American Indian Studies.”** Adding “Indigenous Studies” centers places outside of the present-day United States of America. While Ethnic Studies encourages global connection, it is a United State focused area of study. Furthermore, Indigenous Studies is neither a phrase nor identity used in California or other parts of North America. Indigenous Studies was not present in 1969 as it was indicated in this draft. Place is absolutely critical and important in Native American Studies/American

Indian curriculum and this appears to be ignored in the current title. We have been erased long enough in school curriculum. The “Sample Lessons and Topic” attempts to address Indigenous food, not people. It is clear that the term Indigenous does not help students understand California homeland here and now. Plus, all other ethnic groups have an element of Indigenous history yet “Indigenous” was not added to their Ethnic Studies affiliations.

- **Revise or replace the “Mascots” sample lesson.** All the lessons are troubling and disturbing examples of amplifying Natives’ past, present, and future. If we are to provide sample lessons for educators to follow, then provide sample lessons that are California Indian vetted and have clearly addressed significant topics. The “Native American Mascots” lessons indicate a model curriculum that is not sustainable and meaningfully created as it stands alone. Instead, it is a hot button issue that was selected. The emphasis on highlighting a moment in time instead of connection with topics such as oppression and sovereignty and pronounces the lack of care and understanding in Native American Studies. There is no mention of the California Racial Mascots Act, AB-30 of 2017. Students are simply not encouraged to make connections with historical oppression and the violation of sovereignty that continues today. The application of this lesson is reserved to class discussion and minimal writing, and not used for any inquiry and advocacy for calling to change the use stereotypes, or even continued use of “pioneer” in the official names of schools or lessons of “Thanksgiving,” “Gold Rush,” “Pioneers,” and “Missions” which continue to be a problem.
- **Move the “Native and Mexican Foodways” sample lesson to the Chicana/o Latina/o Studies and replace it with an effective one in the Native American Studies segment.** It is poor and inadequate. It belongs in the Chicana/o/x Latina/o/x Studies section as it was located in the first draft. While there is now a proliferation of curriculum surrounding California Indian and North American Native foodways, there is no reflection of it in the lesson. This lesson is essentialist and does not prepare students to understand the history and contemporary of the California Indian homeland ecology and foodways.
- **Remove the UC approved high school Native American Studies course as they are not culturally relevant in content and pedagogy.** The course outlines showcased are de-contextualized and lend themselves to stereotypes of Native American history and experience. For example the first course outline is focused on “spirituality” without any regard to introducing students to the “doctrine of discovery,” “genocide and murder” because of spiritual difference and the resistance against “colonial settler” spirituality.
- **Add the over 109 California tribes** languages, regions, and figures as basic information that show that we are still alive. Currently only a few are listed in the key topics section of the lesson about the Bay Area Shell Mound.
- **This curriculum should not be approved** as is, without California Indian “teacher” consultation.

In closing, Ethnic Studies colleagues throughout the State support us. We are not standing alone. Please focus your efforts on including, not excluding California Indian and North American Native American/American Indian groups’ perspective in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

and others to come. **Would you be able and willing to meet with us to discuss this matter and way of improving the Model Curriculum before the third draft?** It is clear that not one California Indian teacher was consulted. Now, more than ever, we need to work together to undo the miseducation surrounding California Indians and Native Americans/American Indians in 2020-2021. May you be well. Take care.

Migwetch, Asqualli, Wado/Thank you,

Signed,

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