

**From:** aitan mizrahi

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 6:18 PM

To: Ethnic Studies; [emails redacted]

Subject: Comments on Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Committee,

My name is Aitan Mizrahi and I'm a native Californian who currently resides in Oakland. My mother's parents came to San Francisco from Poland following the Holocaust and my father followed my mom back from Israel to San Francisco in 1970. My father's family originated in the hill country of Kurdistan. They have worked hard to be positive members of the community. My mom worked as a teacher and my father was in construction for the last 40 years. I feel fortunate coming from an ethnically diverse family and being raised in a progressive and open-minded community in the San Francisco Bay Area. I wish for all students to have the opportunities I had to feel welcomed and seen as a unique and valuable member of society.

I would like to thank the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and I believe there is a bit more work to be done. [As one of the 500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage](#) who was ignored in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum I want the Curriculum to reflect all peoples.

In keeping with AB 2016's objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," my community, and the [more than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups](#) in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

When the primary reference of Jews in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum is in the context of our communities being the beneficiaries of white privilege – my Middle Eastern Jewish community, which is comprised of multiple immigrants and people of color, is completely erased. I fear this unit will contribute to the dangerous antisemitic trope that, "[Jews Have Too Much Power](#)." Furthermore, this reference ignores the experiences of European Jews who continue to be personally impacted by violent white-supremacy, genocide, and acts of antisemitism.

At a time when there is great need to provide our students with high-quality

educational content related to bigotry, it is essential to incorporate adequate instructional material on antisemitism – not just simplistic references to it.

### **Direct Asks**

**All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, and other minority groups from the region [who together represent 60% of California's Middle Eastern population and have asked for inclusion](#).** In order for the curriculum to avoid an essentialist understanding of Arabs and the Middle East, and in order to be well balanced, each group should be **equally and equitably represented** in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum.

I would like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson plan, [“Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews”](#) produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, as it will provide students with high-quality instruction on contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience. This lesson plan was written by a scholar of Middle Eastern education specifically to fit into California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The ESMC should make clear that under the “broadly defined umbrella of Asian Studies” are Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent ~60% of CA’s MENA population. California Department of Education’s Chapter 3 agrees: appropriate topics in the Asian section of Ethnic Studies courses are “the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners.”

Thank you for your time and courage to do the good work.

Be well,

Aitan Mizrahi  
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