



May 18, 2020

Dear Board of Education Members:

On behalf of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa counties, we are writing to share our perspective in the event you consider a resolution on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

JCRC appreciates the value of Ethnic Studies and the research demonstrating its benefits on students. We recognize the long history and struggle to teach Ethnic Studies at the K-12 level, and that differing philosophical approaches to the subject matter continue to exist.

Racial and ethnic disparities and injustices in California and across America have been laid bare by the COVID-19 crisis, making the need for Ethnic Studies all the more important today. A rigorous and pedagogically sound Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that meets [the guidelines](#) set by the California Department of Education (CDE) could be of great benefit to teachers and students across the state.

However, there were significant problems with the first draft of the Model Curriculum released in August 2019. During the public comment period of the original draft, CDE received more than 20,000 comments, most of them leveling criticism from faith and ethnic communities concerned about content and exclusion of their experiences.

Our Jewish community concerns include the following:

- Though the Model Curriculum specifies the importance of studying hate crimes, bias, prejudice, and discrimination, and rightly includes racism and Islamophobia, antisemitism is glaringly omitted.
- The Model Curriculum does not acknowledge Jews as an ethnic or religious group.
- The Model Curriculum contains denigrating references to Jews and Israelis.
- The Model Curriculum includes the divisive Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS), deeply inappropriate for our education system.

Beyond these concerns, there is general definitional murkiness, lack of rigor, and inconsistent application of standards. There are also some pedagogically inappropriate activities including one that asks students to step forward if any women in their family have been sexually harassed.

Please see the attached backgrounder for more information.

The CDE has acknowledged these concerns and is working on addressing them through a revision process. In August 2019, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, President of the California State Board of

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Pursuing a Just Society and a Secure Jewish Future



Education, [wrote the following](#):

“A model curriculum should be accurate, free of bias, appropriate for all learners in our diverse state, and align with Governor Newsom’s vision of a California for all. The current draft model curriculum falls short and needs to be substantially redesigned. Following the Instructional Quality Commission’s review and response to all public comments, a new draft will be developed for State Board of Education review and potential approval. The Board will ultimately adopt an ethnic studies model curriculum that aligns to California’s values.”

State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and others have also weighed in and promised that the draft will be revised and improved to [“honor the human experience and the intersectionality of all students that we serve.”](#)

Therefore, **we respectfully urge you to consider the following steps:**

1. We ask that you bring these and other ethnic communities’ concerns into consideration when discussing resolutions on Ethnic Studies.
2. We ask that you refrain from supporting the original draft of the Model Curriculum.
3. Instead, we recommend supporting the California Department of Education’s process to create a high-quality revised draft that meets the statutory requirements of AB-2016, the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Guidelines, and California’s Education Code.

Please contact us with any questions (kstiller@jcrc.org). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tyler Gregory
Executive Director

Karen Stiller
Director, Middle East Project

JCRC has a membership of 50 synagogues and Jewish organizations from across the Bay Area. We believe in a strong, civil and democratic society, and recognize that the Jewish community has a special interest in safeguarding our democracy. JCRC advocates, often in coalition with other communities, for a just society and a secure future for all minority groups.