

2534 Chilton Way
Berkeley, CA 94704
August 7, 2019

Ms Soomin Chao, Chair
Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Suite 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Ms. Chao and members of the Instructional Quality Committee,

I am writing to voice my concerns about the proposed California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum now being considered by the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Department of Education. My objections go far beyond specific pages or citations. This entire curriculum reads as an extreme political agenda being presented under cover of an ethnic studies program.

At a time when many of us are concerned about the divisive right-wing bigotry we hear from Donald Trump, this curriculum exposes our children to the equally divisive bigotry of the extreme left.

This curriculum does not further the stated goals of enabling students to “develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion” nor will it “aid in the eradication of bigotry, hate and racism.” Instead, it focuses on promoting a simplistic understanding of “systems of power and privilege” in which capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy are seen as the source of all ills. The world—and the world of each classroom—is divided into good guys versus bad guys, oppressor and victim, as defined by the drafters of this curriculum.

For example, imagine the fallout from the “privilege” exercise on pages 28-30. Students are asked to expose private information about personal and family life, with the goal of raising consciousness about who is privileged and who is not. Yet consider this: Many of the “privileged” students may be the descents of immigrants who came to the United States at the turn of the last century to escape poverty and oppression in their native countries, were first spat upon and scorned in their new country and now, several generations later, are an American success story. Are these students to feel guilt and shame at their ancestors’ success, while less privileged students are encouraged to see themselves as victims, and therefore entitled to a sense of moral superiority? This is the dynamic this curriculum will create.

As a Jewish Californian, I find the proposed ethnic studies curriculum particularly disturbing on three counts:

- 1) The Jewish people, who have been historically marginalized and oppressed, who constitute 2% of the American population, who have made enormous contributions to American cultural and intellectual life and social justice movements, and who themselves include a diversity of cultural and racial backgrounds, are not included in this ethnic studies curriculum.

2) A one-sided, anti-Zionist agenda has been inserted into this curriculum, particularly through the Arab American Studies section. Rather than creating understanding by presenting multiple perspectives on an already charged and complex situation, the curriculum simply passes on to a new generation a mindset that can only perpetuate conflict.

3) The Arab American Studies section does not explore the rich diversity of ethnicities and religious groups who have populated the Middle East—including indigenous Middle Eastern Jews. It gives the impression that Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim identities are one and the same and the only important one in the region.

The California Department of Education and the Instruction Quality Commission should be aware that these choices are politically-motivated and strategic: negating Jewish history and identity, falsely presenting Israel as an oppressive regime and the BDS movement and its supporters as being aligned with progressive values, are the hallmarks of the anti-Semitism of the far left.

I predict that if this biased and intellectually dishonest curriculum is adopted, more parents of “privilege,” many of whom believe in and want to support public education, will pull their children out of California’s public schools. I know I would.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Malka Weitman".

Malka Weitman
malkaw@earthlink.net

cc: Tony Thurmond
Gavin Newsom