

From: David Siegel
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 12:56 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ethnic studies curriculum

Dear Instructional Quality Commission:

As a grandparent of 4 Jewish California public elementary school students, I remain very concerned about the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). While there have been some changes from the original version, in my view, the curriculum has gone from horrendous to very bad. My concerns include the following:

The few references to Jews are inaccurate and offensive. There is no discussion of antisemitism, but you do include a UC course that equates the experience of Jewish and Irish immigrants in the US and lumps them together as "holders of racial privilege." Frankly, this is absurd. The experience of the Christian Irish is far different from Jews both historically and currently. When was the last time terrorists shot up an Irish church, museum, or store? White supremacists in Charlottesville were not chanting "Irish will not replace us." As well documented by the Anti-Defamation League, antisemitic violence is wide-spread and on the rise in this country. Attacks by white supremacists on synagogues in Poway and Pittsburg and by Black Nationalist groups on a kosher grocery in Jersey City are but 2 examples. It is absurd and hypocritical for a curriculum that aims to raise awareness of prejudice to exclude these facts and their implications.

ESMC also recommends a UC course that covers the "philosophy" of the Nation of Islam, a group described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as deeply racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBT. Their leader, Elijah Mohammad, has referred to Judaism as a "gutter religion." This is appalling and needs to be excised. One wonders at the motivation of educators who include this reference to the Nation of Islam.

ESMC needs correction when it refers to "the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners" in Chapter 3 under "Asian." This vague language is misleading, as California's Middle Eastern population is made up, in its majority, by ethnic groups other than Arabs. The ESMC needs to "accurately and equitably represent the cultural and racial diversity of California so it is balanced", as the State Board of Education's Standards and ESMC Guidelines require. To be balanced and accurate, this section needs to list all these groups by name: Iranians, who comprise 26% of California's MENA population; Jews of MENA descent who comprise 28%; Assyrian Christians, Coptic Christians, other Middle Eastern Christian; Zoroastrians, Baha'is, Yezidis, and Kurds. To do otherwise -- to sweep them under the heading of "Arabs" or "other" (when in fact many of their family members have been subject to persecution and in some cases genocidal violence by their Arab neighbors) -- ranks them as less important, and is an appalling cultural erasure. I can only conclude that these errors are either based on ignorance or are politically motivated.

More broadly, ESMC advocates a narrow political philosophy. This does not comport with the guidelines of AB 2016, and it does not serve the interests of any California

students, including Jewish students, who all need to thrive in California's pluralistic society. It would help to add Elements of Balanced Curriculum from the LA Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Curriculum to provide solid ground rules for course development.

In summary, numerous sections of the ESMC need revision to expose students to “multiple and often competing sources of information” and to ensure that diverse viewpoints are respected. Based on the minimal and insufficient changes made to the original curriculum, it would appear that an entirely new group of educators should be in charge of making extensive revisions to ESMC. Otherwise, I fear that the biases and inaccuracies in ESMC will continue.

Sincerely,
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