

Dear members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

We are Jewish high school students and non-Jewish student allies from across California, writing to share our feedback about the new draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). We come from diverse backgrounds, including Persian Jews, Latinx Jews, Black Jews, Sephardi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Israeli Jews, Jews from the former Soviet Union, and more.

We wholeheartedly support an ESMC that centers the African American, Asian American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, and Native American communities. Now more than ever, we believe in high school ethnic studies courses as a way to empower students, build understanding, and eradicate racism.

We also appreciate some of the new references to Jewish Americans in the ESMC. A major goal of ethnic studies is for students from underrepresented groups to see their histories and experiences reflected in the classroom. Especially given the rise of antisemitism in high schools, this should apply to diverse Jewish students like us.

Far too many of us have faced anti-Jewish hatred. Antisemitic incidents in high schools across California include [swastikas drawn on high school buildings](#), [Nazi songs sung by school sports teams](#), and [Nazi salutes at parties](#). In the bigger picture, the Jewish community in Poway was attacked by a white supremacist terrorist last year and [antisemitism continues to rise](#) in our state. Learning about antisemitism in all its forms is [crucial to building a full understanding](#) of racism and discrimination in America.

We are relieved to know that openly anti-Israel and antisemitic content has been removed from the ESMC. It was deeply disturbing for many of us to be faced with the threat of such hatred and bias being taught in our schools. That said, we are still very concerned that the “Guiding Values and Principles” in Chapter 1 of the ESMC will be used to justify promoting anti-Zionism, BDS, and one-sided narratives against Israel within ethnic studies courses.

For example, Guiding Value and Principle #6 is to “connect ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on the global and local levels”. This could be applied in a way that is empowering and educational for us and our peers. Unfortunately, due to confusion about the harmful goals and impacts of anti-Zionism and BDS, it could also be applied in a way that leads to attacks on our identities. This would be a clear violation of Guiding Value and Principle #1: “cultivate empathy... self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants”. We urge you to clarify this section and include strong guidelines about fostering critical thinking, rather than one-sided political advocacy, division, and hate.

Beyond the issue of antisemitism, we believe learning about the Jewish community in its full diversity would add value to ethnic studies courses. The new draft of the ESMC should be revised so that references to Jews reflect our different identities and experiences. This means

adding the stories of Jewish refugees and immigrants from the Arab world, Iran, Israel, Central and South America, and the former Soviet Union. The experiences of Jews of color are essential to include as well. Our identities prove that ethnicity and identity are not monolithic and we hope this is reflected in ethnic studies courses across California.

Lastly, although this may not be the intent, we find the following language in Chapter 3 offensive and exclusionary, in regards to Asian American Studies: "Topics may include.. the unique experiences of Arab Americans and other Middle Easterners".

Mizrahi Jews, Iranians, Kurds, Assyrian-Christians, Coptic-Christians, Yezidis, Baha'is, and Zoroastrians [represent](#) "an estimated combined total population of over 500,000, or at least 60%, of the Middle Eastern diasporic population in California". Many of us come from one or more of these communities. We and our peers from other Middle Eastern groups deserve to be included as equals with Arab Americans, rather than having our unique identities erased or ignored. This applies to Asian American Studies units and the curriculum as a whole.

As students, we and our younger siblings are the ones who will be most deeply affected by the decisions you make about the ESMC. We deeply appreciate your time and consideration of our input on this vitally important issue.

Sincerely,

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