

From: Zachary Patterson
Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2020 6:06 PM
To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies- Removal of cultural bias

Good afternoon,

My name is Zachary Patterson and I am a student in San Diego Unified School District. I am writing today in regards to the revised ethnic studies curriculum.

I want to start by thanking you for all of your work in creating a BIPOC focused curriculum. For our African American and indigenous communities this curriculum is taking a strong step towards proving that their history matters just as much as any other piece of eurocentric history. Thank you!

With that said, I also want to bring up my primary concerns with the new curriculum. While immense progress was made in the last draft, anti-Israel sentiment can still be found throughout the curriculum. While Israel is currently a hot button issue, there is no reason to take sides within the curriculum. There is no question that Palestinians and Israelis need fundamental human rights, and need to coexist. However, it is unfair to share one perspective on the issue that leads to perspectives that Zionism and Judaism are white supremacy groups.

Specifically, my concerns are with the following:

1. The "Guiding Values and Principles" in [Chapter 1](#) of the ESMC directly reference and are partly based on specific pages from a book called *Education at War*. The relevant section of the book effectively encourages teachers to "develop solidarity and create linkages" with anti-Zionism, BDS, and anti-Israel narratives. While this book has many valid points, the criticism towards Israel and in support of BDS continue to create division within the community. It is important that we create an inclusive curriculum and use inclusive sources. This allows for all students to feel safe and represented in the classroom. If we choose to use these sources we risk alienating the many Jewish students of color who will feel that this curriculum does not accurately represent the experiences of their ancestors. **The guiding values and principles should be revised to ensure that they cannot be used to justify promoting such hateful agendas in the classroom.**

2. The second concern I have is regarding the many minority groups that make up Asia. Although not usually perceived this way, the Middle East has many different minority groups that have faced oppression throughout the years. It is critical that the curriculum does not solely associate the Middle East with Arabs and Islam. This is a critical part of the region, but it is not the entire region. Other groups that have lived in the region for thousands of years include: Mizrahi Jews, Iranians, Kurds, Assyrian-Christians, Coptic-Christians, Yezidis, Baha'is, and Zoroastrians. However, in the curriculum they are lumped together as "other Middle Easterners." The issue with this is that by specifying Arabs but using the term "Other Middle Easterners" we are creating a situation where the experience of Arabs is highlighted above the experience of many other groups. This is not to say that Arab history should not be taught, because it should; rather, the focus is to explain how a holistic picture of the Middle East should include all minority groups that have experienced oppression. While this would add significant information to this section of the curriculum, it is the only representative of California to include these minority groups if Middle Eastern history is being taught.

3. In Appendix A, where Jewish experiences are talked about, references ask students to compare how Irish Americans and Jews began to receive privilege in the same manner. While there is no denying that **white** Jews have gained privilege as a matter of being white, this statement disregards the fact that there is a significant population of Jews of color, and that Jewish people have experienced rising anti-semitism that has continued to alienate them. If the events in Poway, California; Charlottesville, Virginia; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania have taught us anything, it is that anti-semitism is alive and well. While it is not and should not be the central focus of ethnic studies, it is unfair to compare the modern day experiences of Jews to that of Irish-Americans. As a Jewish student, writing an essay describing how I have the same privilege as an Irish-American would not be reflective of my own experiences and that of my community. I feel it would also disregard the fact that anti-semitism is real and continues to dictate how I live my life. I have the ability to hide my Judaism. Oftentimes, I feel that I must in order to fit in and not be alienated. This is a distinct reality that I face. While I wholeheartedly admit that I have privilege, it would hurt me to see my ancestors experiences conveyed in this manner.

4. Finally, Chapter 3 helps build a perspective that all Jews are white and European. In order to gain a full perspective of the oppression that Jews have faced it must be recognized that this is not the case. Ashkenazi Jews are white but Sephardi and Mizrahi are usually not. The experiences of Ethiopian Jews who faced oppression in Ethiopia for hundreds of years is very real. If we portray all Jews as white we diminish the experiences of hundreds of thousands of Jews of color. This inaccurate representation could risk alienating the very people we are trying to connect to. In addition, it allows the proliferation of the narrative that Judaism and Zionism are white supremacy movements. We must be inclusive of the experiences of all Jews.

Thank you for your immense work on this curriculum. I am proud to live in a state where people are working to create an empowering BIPOC curriculum. I hope we can continue to improve for the sake of all of our students.

Best,

Zachary Patterson