

From: IQC
Sent: Wednesday, October 14, 2020 10:26 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: FW: Addressing Harmful Content in the ESMC

From: Susan George
Sent: Wednesday, October 14, 2020 10:20 AM
To: [list of recipients redacted]; Ethnic Studies
Cc: [emails redacted]
Subject: Addressing Harmful Content in the ESMC

October 14, 2020
Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
Chief Deputy Superintendent Stephanie Gregson
Instructional Quality Commission Executive Director Shanine Coats
Instructional Quality Commission Members

Re: Anti-Zionism as a Cover for Hatred of the Jewish People

Dear State Superintendent Thurmond, Chief Deputy Superintendent Gregson, IQC Executive Director Coats, and all Members of the IQC:

Progressive Zionists of California (PZC) is a grassroots collective of California Democratic Party leaders and citizens focused on educating California's government leaders, elected officials, and the public about antisemitism and intersectional Zionism. We work for a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—two-states for two-peoples.

Superintendent Thurmond, on October 2 you acknowledged Californians' call "for ethnic studies because education can provide a clear path to a more just society." PZC wholeheartedly agrees. Ethnic studies and the conversations they engender are more crucial than ever in an increasingly diverse state. We write to you with our concerns that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) will retain content harmful to Jewish and to all students. We call on the Department of Education and Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to approve an ESMC that contains no antisemitic materials. Since there will not be an opportunity to meaningfully vet new content before the IQC commissioners' vote in November, we submit the following to help ensure that the ESMC you approve in November does not have antisemitic content.

Firstly, schools cannot discriminate on the basis of national origin and religion generally (Federal Civil Rights Act and CA Education Code 220). This is also embedded in the California Education Code:

- "The state board ...shall not adopt ...instructional materials for use in the public schools that contain any matter reflecting adversely upon persons on the basis of ...religion [or] nationality" CA Education Code 51501.
- "A teacher shall not give instruction...that promotes a discriminatory bias on the basis of ...religion [or] nationality." CA Education Code 51500.
- "All instructional materials ...shall be...accurate, objective, and current and suited to the needs and comprehension of pupils." CA Education Code 60045.
- The State Board of Education's 2018 approved ESMC Guidelines require that the ESMC "include accurate information...encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together,

highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as ...indigeneity...rigorous analysis of history [and] be inclusive.”

Secondly, antisemitic hate crimes in California have increased 72% since 2016, remaining the number three ethnic-based and number one religious-based hate crime in California and the nation. This year appears to be on the same unsettling trajectory. In one example, numerous Redwood and other [Marin County](#) high school students have been the targets of repeated, vile [antisemitic harassment](#) campaigns.

Antisemitism is not just the enterprise of white supremacists. It is a persistent hatred that ebbs and flows, coming from the political right, political left, and religious extremists.

The Jewish community has been vocal about its concerns that antisemitism seeped into both drafts of the ESMC. Over 30,000 members of the public urged the IQC to remove derogatory language about Jews. Well over 15,000 people named one of the key problems—the ESMC’s references, direct and hidden, to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. We are referring to elements specifically such as:

- the definition of BDS in the 2019 glossary as a freedom movement;
- the imprecise framing around the 1948 war, the encouragement of teachers to highlight BDS as well as a pro-BDS group called Direct Action for Palestine with no Israeli or Jewish voices to round out understanding of why the conflict started;
- the inclusion of reference materials such as Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade’s “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S” and “*Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*” edited by San Francisco State’s Rabab Abdulhadi and Nadine Naber (Appendix). A chapter in their book is about murder and martyrdom : “Palestinian women’s disappearing act:the suicide bomber through Western feminist eyes.”
- The inclusion of an anti-Israel poem which insinuates Jews control the media and use it to manipulate the public - a common antisemitic slur.

Groups like Jewish Voice for Peace, which support the inclusion of these elements, are not representative of the Jewish community as a whole. Only three of the over 45,000 letters and petitions sent to the IQC last month were from JVP members. Moreover, [they represent only 5-7%](#) of Jews across the United States.

Thirdly, misinformation abounds about what BDS is. At its core, it is a movement which erases the fact that Israel has been the indigenous homeland of the Jewish people for over 3,000 years, and seeks to deny Jews their right to self-determination. BDS is anti-Zionist and antisemitic because it aims only to deny Jews this right. [Four out of five Jews](#) consider the BDS movement anti-semitic.

One of the leading proponents of including BDS and other anti-Zionist materials in the ESMC, the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) and its Executive Director, Lara Kiswani, have a long history of anti-Jewish advocacy, [tweeting in 2014](#), “Help us kick Zionism out of the Bay Area.” At a meeting held at UC Berkeley, [Kiswani](#) responded to a question from a Jewish participant by saying, “As long as you continue to be on that side [Israel], I’m going to continue to hate you.”

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum must not include BDS, and other highly politicized conversations about Middle Eastern conflicts that create unsafe classrooms for Jewish and Middle Eastern minority students throughout California. As leaders in the enactment of AB 2016, we are **counting on you** to ensure that the final draft meets the standards the state has enacted, and does not reinforce antisemitic bigotry across the state.

Sincerely,

Susan George

Executive Director
Progressive Zionists of California

Susan George

Executive Director

she/her/hers

Your Zionist Voice in California Democratic Politics

cc:

Governor Gavin Newsom

State Assembly Member, Rob Bonta

State Assembly Member, David Chiu

State Assembly Member, Jesse Gabriel