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Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum
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Wednesday, August 14, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Assembly Bill No. 2016, passed on September 13, 2016, was designed to promote inclusivity and diversity in public education in the state of California. Ethnic Studies would create opportunities for minority students to rewrite narratives of oppression and otherness, allowing many students to feel seen with regard to their social studies education. The proposed model curriculum attempts to aid the process of reclamation of narratives by all students, regardless of race, national origin, or ethnicity. However, the proposed curriculum offers a one-sided position on the experience of individuals with ancestry from the Levant, particularly Israel/Palestine.

Apart from attempting to make sense of the highly-nuanced geopolitical situation of the region in a manner digestible for high school students, the proposed curriculum fails to even mention the experience of Jews or Israel within the ethnic studies model curriculum. Rather, narratives portraying Israel as a colonialist state (lines 5802-5803) are provided as evidence or support of one story while neglecting another. The emotions expressed by rapper Shadia Mansour are poignant and may echo the voices of many Palestinian-Americans, but these are not presented in conjunction with narratives from other individuals within the same region. In writing curriculum inclusive of all experiences, allowing one to take precedence over another is wholly contradictory to the intent of an ethnic studies curriculum. Again, in line 4992 of the proposed model curriculum, the description of the mass exodus of Palestinians from the newly created state of Israel as the “Nakba” gives credence to the legitimacy of a Palestinian narrative over an Israeli one. Nowhere within the framework of the curriculum does it call for the teaching of

Israeli and Palestinian narratives in context to one another. After 2,000 years of exile, members of the Jewish Diaspora attained self-determination in the creation of a Jewish homeland. Jewish presence has been documented within the land of Israel for over 3300 years, yet the model curriculum negates Jewish indigeneity to the land of Israel. The one-sidedness of the portrayal of Israel in a Palestinian lense isn't problematic in and of itself, but the lack of a complementary narrative (different, yet still similar in many cases of discrimination) will create a biased perspective of a highly nuanced issue. Furthermore, in wake of recent attacks on Jewish communities in the United States (Pittsburgh and Poway) there is no definition of Anti-Semitism offered as part of the Ethnic Studies curriculum. While Islamophobia has a clear-cut definition, there is nothing to begin to detail violence against Jews and its impact on Jewish communities across the nation and across the state.

As a California high schooler, I applaud the intent behind AB 2016. Uplifting long-downtrodden voices through education is a key facet to ensuring equity for all people regardless of race, religion, ethnic/national origin, sexual/gender identity, or ability. It is my hope that in devising the proposed curriculum pupils, as well as educators, be sought after for the development of the curriculum, as stipulated in Section 1 (j) of AB 2016: encouraging the participation of pupils and members of the community in the development of an ethnic studies model curriculum. I understand that my concerns have been echoed by others in the Jewish community and I appreciate your time in reading my concerns about this model curriculum. If you have any questions or concerns please reach out to me and I will be happy to discuss my views on the proposed ethnic studies model curriculum. I look forward to receiving a response as soon as possible.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Bertet', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Julian Bertet