

From: Adeena Bleich

Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2021 9:48 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Cc: Sapir Taib; [email redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please reform the CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum to respect the story of the entire Jewish community

Dear Honorable State Board of Education Members,

I am the mother of two Middle Eastern Jews Ezra aged 2 and Jonah aged 3, whose father's family escaped persecution against Jews Turkey and later Syria. They escaped by foot crossing fields of land mines, mountains and desert and took dozens of Jewish orphans with them from Syria. My mother-in-law was 10 months old as they made this treacherous journey and was at one point left behind in the desert due to fear her crying would alert the Syrian guards at the border. By the will of gd they returned for her and she was safe and made the final journal with her to Turkey. If they had not returned for her, my husband and children would not exist today. My father-in-law still has a copy of his property in Syria that was taken from his father by the Syrian government. He believes that maybe one day Syria will be an enlightened democratic Country that might give him back the land that belongs to his family. It is with his hope of such a better world that I hope this committee will open their minds and hearts to make the changes being asked for in the ethnic studies curriculum by the people who have lived the atrocities themselves.

I am the granddaughter of a polish immigrant whose entire Jewish community in Poland were rounded up and burned alive by their neighbor's days after she escaped on one of the last boats to America before Hitler's full invasion. Both of my parents were harassed and denigrated by Irish gangs growing up for being "dirty Jews." In my time attending inner City High School I was asked where my "Jew horns" were. And my Bubbi, of blessed memory, a Sabbath observant Jew, was required to take her promotional tests for the City of NY on the Sabbath since no exceptions would be made for her faith. I share my family's story of discrimination not to complain but to offer insight into the multi-varied complex origin stories that make up the Jewish community in America and around the world. And we ABSOLUTELY must allow each minority group to tell their own story as they experience it--not be written in a compromise or by a second or third hand party.

Persecution is not relative or comparative. All of us who have been persecuted must all join together against any and all hate. And we must make sure that all ethnicities share their stories so that we can all learn and work together to prevent hate and persecution in all its forms. I want Jonah and Ezra to learn the history of their Syrian family as well as the stories of all the other minorities they may sit and play and share with when they are old enough for school.

I appreciate that the California Department of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission are recommending that the "Anti-Semitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans" lesson be included in the Ethnic Curriculum. My family appeals to the SBE to ALSO honor the lived history of my husband's family and all other Jews of the Middle East by making the additional changes that JIMENA (*see below) and other organizations are asking for to the ethnic studies curriculum.

In solidarity for a kinder more united CA and world. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

In gratitude,

Adeena Bleich

Los Angeles resident

***JIMENA requested additions and changes**

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum correctly recognizes in its guiding principles that addressing bigotry – including anti-Semitism -- is foundational to Ethnic Studies.

I appreciate that acknowledgement and that the California Department of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) are recommending that the “Anti-Semitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans” lesson be included in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC).

In addition to honoring this IQC recommendation, I urge the State Board of Education (SBE) to do the following:

1) Remove bias from the ESMC and treat Asian communities with proportionality and balance as California* and Federal laws and the State Board of Education’s Content Standards and ESMC Guidelines require.

Move “Anti-Semitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans” (currently lesson 40) to the “Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies” section to pair it with the IQC-recommended lessons that focus on Islamophobia and xenophobia of South Asians (currently lessons 33, 34 and 35) (Appendix A). This aligns with the ESMC's recommended "thematic approach to ethnic studies" which stresses "the importance of identifying shared struggles." (Preface and Chapter 3)

The Asian Studies section does not mention the lived experiences of Jewish and other non-Arab Middle Eastern Americans despite their accounting for more than 60% of California’s Middle Eastern population. This section features 10 Asian ethnic groups that include Arabs and Muslims in America (from Asia and elsewhere) and offers multiple lessons that mention anti-Muslim discrimination.

Despite Judaism properly listed as a major South Asian religion (Lesson 33), this section also omits antisemitism -- reminiscent of the omissions that embroiled the ESMC’s first draft in controversy. Antisemitism continues to be the most prevalent religious-based hate crime in the United States and California according to FBI statistics -- comprising 68% of all religious-based hate crimes targeting the Jewish 2% of the population. Anti-Muslim hate crimes comprise 12% of the religious-based hate crimes total for 1% of the population.

2) Add links to the primary sources in the “Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans” lesson’s definitions of antisemitism. SBE’s ESMC Guidelines require that the ESMC “include access to ...primary source documents.”

3) Include the seven-minute United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video, "Antisemitism Today" in the “Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans” lesson. This video provides succinct and compelling information on contemporary antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bigotry further enriching and reinforcing content in the Asian Studies section.

I offer my gratitude for your hard work bringing a robust Ethnic Studies curriculum that presents difficult content with nuance, sensitivity, and empathy to California’s classrooms.

*California’s Constitution and Education Code prohibit discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, and religion.