



ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA

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BY EMAIL AND FIRST-CLASS MAIL

Ms. Soomin Chao
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Re: Proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Chairperson Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the oldest and one of the largest pro-Israel organizations in the U.S., whose mission includes fighting anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias in the media, in schools and on college campuses, and wherever it exists. We are deeply troubled by the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) that was created by the ESMC Advisory Committee and urge you to reject it and require that it be revised.

The proposed curriculum is supposed to give students an appreciation of the contributions that multiple cultures have made to our society. Yet the ESMC ignores the contributions of Jews, and actually encourages anti-Jewish hatred and bigotry.

Jews are essentially not acknowledged as an ethnic group in the ESMC, which makes only a few passing references to Jews. Even worse, we understand from the California Legislative Jewish Caucus' July 29, 2019 letter objecting to the ESMC (with which we fully agree) that the exclusion of Jews was deliberate, reflecting the prejudices of those who drafted the ESMC. It is despicable and unacceptable that anyone's personal biases and prejudices could be incorporated into a school curriculum that is supposed to educate and positively impact students.

Another problem is that while the ESMC specifically discusses bias against other communities, there is no discussion of anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitism that is masked as legitimate criticism of Israel. As you may know, the U.S. government, as well as 30 other countries around the world, use a definition of anti-Semitism that recognizes that some anti-Israelism crosses the line into anti-Semitism. (See <https://www.state.gov/defining-anti-semitism/>.)

The ESMC Glossary includes the following terms: Racism, Sexism, Anthropocentrism, Cisheteropatriarchy, Heteropatriarchy, Classism, Colonialism, Homophobia, Imperialism, Islamophobia, Patriarchy, Transphobia, White Supremacy, and Xenophobia. It is both shocking and outrageous that the Glossary does not include the term Anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism is the oldest hatred and today is at near-historic levels. For as long as the FBI has maintained hate crime statistics (for more than 20 years), they show that most religious hate crimes are, by a wide margin, directed against Jews. In fact, the latest FBI statistics reflect that the number of hate

crimes against Jews exceeds the number of hate crimes committed against all other religious groups combined. Less than a year ago, our country suffered the single deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history, when 11 Jews were murdered at a Pittsburgh synagogue and several others were wounded.

California is one of four states with the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. Just last April on the last day of Passover, a bigot opened fire at the Chabad of Poway synagogue, murdering one woman and injuring three others, including the synagogue's rabbi. It is alarming and intolerable that a curriculum that addresses seemingly every type of discrimination would ignore prejudice against and hatred of Jews.

For anyone who might suggest that omitting anti-Semitism was an oversight, the fact that the ESMC actually denigrates Jews should put that suggestion to rest. The ESMC's sample course outlines include a rap song, with lyrics that actually say that Israelis "use the press so they can manufacture" (Chapter 2, Sample Course Models, at p. 269) – feeding a disgusting anti-Semitic stereotype that Jews control the media.

In addition, the ESMC promotes the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. In the Glossary, the ESMC gives a one-sided, anti-Israel definition of BDS – including falsely describing BDS as "a social global movement that currently aims to establish freedom for Palestinians living under apartheid conditions." (See Chapter 4, Glossary and Bibliography, p. 2.) In fact, Israel does not impose apartheid conditions on anyone. What the definition fails to acknowledge is the true aim of BDS, according to the movement's own leaders – the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel.

As the California Legislative Jewish Caucus aptly stated, "[i]t would be a cruel irony if a curriculum meant to help alleviate prejudice and bigotry were to instead marginalize Jewish students and fuel hatred and discrimination against the Jewish community. Without significant edits, the ESMC will do just that."

We at the ZOA completely agree. The ESMC must be rejected in its current form. California students should not be getting – as *The Washington Times* put it, "a crash course in anti-Semitism." They must be provided with an accurate, balanced and scholarly understanding of Jews and other ethnic groups.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We are here to help as this process of creating an appropriate ethnic studies curriculum proceeds.

Very truly yours,



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