

From: Loren Sacks
Sent: Saturday, August 10, 2019 8:47 AM
To: Tony@tonythurmond.com; Tony Thurmond; Ethnic Studies
Cc: JIAC@betham.org
Subject: Proposed ESMC's Unacceptable Failings

To the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education and to State Superintendent Tony Thurmond:

I write to you today to urgently request major revisions to the proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Having lived in the great state of California since the age of two years, I am exceptionally proud of this region of the country. I am a product of the California public education system and the son of a state educator. I completed my medical training through the University of California and have had the distinct pleasure of serving the children of both Northern and Southern California. I have been a life-long proponent of progressive, inclusive education of all our state's (and our nation's) children.

I am also the father of two young boys currently enrolled in the public California school system. I am also a Jew, and proud of my community's historic contributions to this state and this country.

Recently, and with minimal time to allow public comment, the Commission has proposed a new curriculum in Ethnic Studies for high school students. I support this movement. However, the curriculum as proposed not only entirely excludes the Jewish community as a minority group but also proceeds to the other extreme and presents points of view that risk promoting antisemitism. To see any state, much less the great state of California, considering the endorsement of an exclusionary and potentially dangerous curriculum is, to say the least, concerning.

The proposed ESMC focuses entirely on the experience of the Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino/a/x, and Asian/Pacific Islander experiences. After reading the proposed guidelines, I agree that these communities have often experienced mistreatment and that this mistreatment has reached the definition of institutional racism. Students should know about this. They must be educated of our history to promote inclusivity and sensitivity. However, how can our state possibly consider such a curriculum without once *mentioning* antisemitism?

Of all hate crimes committed in this country due to religion, an estimated 50% are targeted against Jews. Antisemitic hate crimes rose by 38% in 2018. When the news media covers "white nationalist" rallies, it is impossible to miss such slogans as "Jews Will Not Replace Us". It is impossible to miss the ever-present swastika, symbol of a Nazi organization that wiped out millions of Jews (including half of my family) during the Holocaust. Despite this, the ESMC makes no mention of the Jewish Community or of antisemitism. It makes no mention of the fact that, for example, through the first two-thirds of the 20th century Jews were not allowed to own property in La Jolla, California. It makes no mention of the fact that Jewish synagogues and schools have been the target of attempted shootings and vandalism for decades here in California. I remember distinctly, in the 1990's, having to hide torah scrolls from our synagogue in my family's home because of a rash of antisemitic acts throughout the Bay Area. I remember, more recently, the threats of violence levied against my son's pre-school

because it was based at a Jewish Community Center. How is it possible that a group targeted with hate for generations is not discussed in a curriculum designed to teach sensitivity to minority communities?

What is worse, the ESMC in its current form goes further than mere ignorance. The curriculum lists The Boycott/Divest/Sanction (BDS) movement against the Jewish State of Israel alongside the MeToo movement for women's rights, the BlackLivesMatter movement, and others. Let us be very clear: The BDS movement is one that presents a biased (to say the least) view of the State of Israel. Its founder has openly stated that this movement's goal is "to bring down" the Israeli nation. This *is* antisemitism. This *is* hatred. This movement does not call for Arabic residents of that region to have equal rights, it calls for the denigration of rights of Jewish residents. To say that this is equivalent to the call for equal rights for women, African Americans, or others is simply false and by presenting such a biased view the curriculum borders on creating state-sponsored antisemitism.

That border is, in my opinion, crossed by further actions of the ESMC's authors. Those who drafted this curriculum relabelled the 1948 war in which Israel won independence as "The Palestine War". This over-simplification of history is revisionist in nature and completely biased. It precludes an understanding of the actions preceding that conflict or the fact that, in that conflict, Israel was the defender and not the aggressor. The curriculum refers to the creation of the State of Israel (the USA's longest standing ally in the Middle East) as the "Nakba", which translates to "the catastrophe". There is a complete focus on the experience of arabic immigrants to the United States without mentioning the Jewish experience a *single time*. The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 is discussed in light of its limitation of Arab immigration, ignoring completely that it was this law that led directly to the inability of Jews to flee Nazi genocide in Europe... ignoring that this law led, in part, to my family's murder.

Perhaps most egregious, this ostensibly progressive curriculum focused on sensitivity to the challenges faced by minorities *includes song-lyrics promoting the antisemitic trope of Jewish control of the media*. This trope, "tweeted" out recently by multiple members of Congress (some of whom are included in this curriculum) led appropriately to outrage and condemnation nationally. The song, by Shadia Mansour, is offensive. The inclusion of it in this curriculum demonstrates just how extensively the Jewish experience, MY experience, is overlooked and denigrated by this curriculum.

I believe that an Ethnic Studies curriculum is a wonderful idea for California's high-school students. I believe that a balanced discussion on biases based on race, gender, orientation, and religion is not only warranted; it is vital to today's populace. However, the curriculum as proposed is unacceptably flawed. By excluding (and at times denigrating) the Jewish community this effort will itself become a demonstration of institutional racism. I fervently hope that the authors, and Superintendent Thurmond, will make vast revisions to this important curriculum. We must, as a state, educate our children. However, that education must be inclusive and as free of bias as possible.

With sincere hope for swift action,
Loren D. Sacks