

From: Kanwar Saluja >

Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2020 9:59 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: Sikh inclusion in CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum [Kanwar Saluja of Walnut Creek, CA]

Dear Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee,

I am writing today to request the meaningful inclusion of Sikhism in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for entry into the public record.

About me

My name is Kanwar Saluja and I have been a resident of California since 2012. I live in Walnut Creek CA and work as a Chief Operating Officer for a software company. I am a father to 3 children who attend Tice Creek Elementary School in the Walnut Creek school district grades 5, 3 and 1.

Bullying suffered by my children

Since my children keep unshorn hair -- a major tenet of the Sikh faith -- all three have faced bullying on the basis of their Sikh identity and appearance at school. My girls are made fun of for having long hair. And while we have repeatedly sought help from the Principal and teachers, the physical harassment particularly of my 7-year old son has continued year after year.

My wife and I are very active at school for fundraisers and even volunteer regularly in the classroom. We have given presentations on Sikhism to the childrens' classrooms every year without fail. I share this because I want you to know that we are a positive and visible force in the school.

And despite our active presence, this has not stopped my 7-year old son from having had his religious head covering torn from his head multiple times unprovoked at school this past year. A common response by ignorant parents has been, "What's the big deal -- it's just a hat!"

And this is the problem...

It's so obvious to us that more more education about Sikhs and Sikhism needs to be included in school curriculum.

Disappointment

On this basis I am extremely disappointed that the Sikh community, which has been an integral part of California's history and economy since the early 1900s, is not represented in a meaningful way in the initial Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft.

There are approximately 250,000 Sikhs in California. A report by the Sikh Coalition found that turbaned Sikhs are bullied at a rate double the national average. I wish to reiterate that the inclusion of Sikhism, the world's fifth largest religion, in the model curriculum in a meaningful

way, is an essential step in overcoming ignorance and in reducing bullying and harassment.

Specifically, I request:

A detailed lesson plan about the Sikh American community to be inserted into the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

More specific examples throughout the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that focus on the myriad of positive Sikh contributions made over 125 years in California, to balance the current language's focus on the hateful backlash against Sikhs in the context of post-9/11 Islamophobia.

The Sikh Coalition and the Jakara Movement will be in communication with you soon, specifying the details of these requests. I ask that the recommendations made in their forthcoming letter be incorporated into the final Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum on my behalf.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,
Kanwar

Kanwar Saluja