

From: Barbara Ash
Sent: Saturday, August 10, 2019 11:59 AM
To: CFIRD
Subject: Safeguards against political indoctrination in ESMC

I am in full agreement with the letter below. I urge to take it seriously under consideration and act accordingly.

Our 83 civil rights, human rights, religious and education organizations are deeply troubled by the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) and truly alarmed that if AB 331 is approved by the California state legislature in the coming days, every high school student in the state will be required to take an ethnic studies course based on the ESMC before graduating. We are aware that many individuals and groups affiliated with the Jewish community have already written to you about the ESMC's shocking omission of information about American Jews and anti-Semitism, its use of classic anti-Semitic stereotypes, and its blatant anti-Israel bias. This includes the California Legislative Jewish Caucus, who wrote to you that they "cannot support a curriculum that erases the American Jewish experience, fails to discuss anti-Semitism, reinforces negative stereotypes about Jews, singles out Israel for criticism and would institutionalize the teaching of anti-Semitic stereotypes in our public schools." Our organizations share all of the serious concerns raised by the Jewish Caucus. We are writing to you, however, because we believe these concerns highlight a much deeper and graver problem, namely, the fact that an educational curriculum can be hijacked by those pushing a political and hateful agenda. If not addressed, this problem threatens to undermine not only the current effort to develop an ethnic studies model curriculum, but all other curricular efforts undertaken by the Department of Education. In order to prevent such abuse and the extremely harmful consequences that will ensue from it, we believe safeguards must be put in place before any state-mandated curriculum is adopted for use in California classrooms. The anti-Jewish, anti-Israel bias of the proposed ESMC curriculum — including its implicit portrayal of Jews and Israel as part of "interlocking systems of oppression and privilege" and its endorsement of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement as a form of "direct action" or "resistance" that students are encouraged to engage in — clearly exposes the politically motivated and directed nature of the curriculum and its drafters. Not surprisingly, more than one-quarter of the Model Curriculum Advisory Committee members, appointed by the State Board of Education to draft the ESMC, have publicly expressed animus towards Israel and its supporters, with some members openly supporting BDS. There is no doubt that these committee members have unconscionably used the state-mandated curriculum as a tool for politically indoctrinating California's high school students with anti-Israel propaganda and encouraging them to engage in political activism against the Jewish state. As an educator and school administrator, you are surely aware of the dangers of allowing political indoctrination to substitute for rigorous scholarship and quality pedagogy. In the case of the ESMC, such political indoctrination impedes the flow of objective information about a complex topic of global importance and deprives students of critical knowledge for adequately understanding their community, their state, their country, and the world. This is certainly not what state legislators had in mind when they approved AB 2016 mandating the development of "a model curriculum in ethnic studies" for use in California high schools, with the primary objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures." Indeed, the political indoctrination at the heart of the ESMC does the exact opposite. Moreover, there is considerable evidence showing that the kind of anti-Zionist propaganda and activism promoted in the ESMC is strongly linked to acts of anti-Jewish hostility. Studies of anti-Semitic activity on college and

university campuses across the country have consistently shown that schools with antiZionist expression and activity, including the promotion of BDS, are about three times more likely to host incidents targeting Jewish students for harm, including acts of harassment, vandalism and assault.

Implementation of a model curriculum that includes the promulgation of such political, ethnic or religious hatred can't help but threaten the safety and well-being of Jewish and pro-Israel high school students in the state. And California college and university campuses, already reeling from the alarming number of anti-Zionist-motivated acts of aggression perpetrated against their Jewish and pro-Israel students, will undoubtedly see dramatic increases in these anti-Semitic acts with the influx of the state's high school graduates. We agree that the ESMC must be drastically revised or completely re-written.

However, unless and until safeguards are put in place for ensuring that its drafters will not be permitted to use the model curriculum to promote political, ethnic or religious enmity towards any group, or to weaponize high school students to take action based on such enmity, we fear that whatever model curriculum is adopted by the IQC will have an enormously negative impact on the state's high schools, colleges and universities for years to come. We strongly urge you, as well as the Board of Education officials and state legislators copied on this e-mail, to immediately address this consequential problem by establishing safeguards for ensuring that all state-sponsored curricula and other instructional materials may never be created or used as tools of political indoctrination that promote hatred and incite harm against any race, religion, group or individual.

Sincerely,

Barbara Ash

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