

**From:** abra siegel

**Sent:** Saturday, August 8, 2020 7:13 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) - URGENT!

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

I recognize the immense challenge of developing a curriculum that is inclusive, educational and not political. Although there have been some improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) from the initial curriculum, I am still very concerned by the latest proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Before I share the specifics, it's important for you to understand some context.

Antisemitism is on the rise around the world and most aggressively and notably on our college campuses throughout the US. My daughter is a student at UC Berkeley and has been verbally harassed for her support of the State of Israel and although she holds all the same values as her peers relative to most, if not all social issues, her support for Israel somehow disqualifies her as a participant in any other social cause. **I want to be really clear about this, this is pure antisemitism and is learned behavior.** The most dangerous aspect of this type of antisemitism is that it is given credibility because it has been institutionalized and is being taught by educators/"Professors." In addition, my son, a student at Palo Alto Senior High School came home from a history class last year (Junior) and shared with us that when his teacher discussed the atrocities of WWII, she said "a lot of people died in that war." My son went on to say how he was so surprised that she never mentioned the "holocaust and the genocide of 6 million Jews," over 90% of the Jewish population of eastern Europe systematically killed. This now has become "a lot of people died." This not so subtle erasure and manipulation of historical facts is becoming increasingly more common in all of our academic institutions. In addition, there is little to no knowledge of Jews from other parts of the world: Mizrahi, Sephardic, Persian, Moroccan, Ethiopian, Egyptian and other Jews of color). My husband is an Iraqi Jew whose family fled Iraq under threat of persecution, where Jews had lived for thousands of years, and were airlifted into Israel in the early 1950's. His Aunt is from Iran and fled to Israel as well. I myself grew up here in San Jose, California in the sixties and was called a "dirty jew" by some kids in my middle and high school. Let me be clear this is not behind us – the Jewish community has lived with antisemitism our entire life and today is no different it is just now being framed within the context of "opposition to Israel," "social justice" better known as the BDS movement among other things. I am increasingly concerned, which leads me to my comments about this new curriculum.

**Now for the curriculum:**

Teaching ethnic studies is important and valuable. I support a curriculum that is inclusive and **APOLITICAL**.

Here are my major concerns (take examples from the JIAC email)

**ESMC guiding values and principles need revision because they are the basis of each unit and lesson plan.** They:

- do not reflect California's shared values, nor the values laid out in AB 2016
- advocate a narrow political philosophy
- establish an "us vs them" agenda
- partly based on the book *Education at War*, which encourages "solidarity" and "linkages" with BDS, and anti-Israel narratives, harmful to many Jewish students

**\* The second draft does not prevent teaching offensive politically indoctrinating and anti-Israel elements from ESMC draft 1.**

- Add Elements of Balanced Curriculum from the LA Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Curriculum to provide solid ground rules for course development
- Numerous sections of the ESMC need revision to expose students to "multiple and often competing sources of information" and ensure that "diverse viewpoints are respected".

\* **The few references to Jews are misleading and offensive.**

- Include Mizrahi and other Jews of color
- Remove links to, and group advocacy of, virulently anti-Israel pro-BDS sites with malicious slander about imaginary genocide
- Include the lesson plan, "[Antisemitism as the Middle Eastern-American Jews](#)," covering contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience produced by the JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa
- Add a definition of antisemitism that addresses sinister stereotyping and double standards against Jews and Jewish institutions from all parts of the political spectrum.

\* **References to Middle Eastern communities should not favor one community over others**

- Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern communities should be represented on an equal basis with Arab Americans.
- Mizrahi Jews and other MENA ethnic groups represent ~60% of CA's MENA population (estimated 500,000 Californians).

I urge you to make significant revisions of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to address these concerns.

Thank you,  
Abra Siegel