

**From:** Esther Brass  
**Sent:** Monday, August 10, 2020 5:34 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** [emails redacted]  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comment on Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

To the California Dept of Education,

I appreciate the improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). I particularly applaud the move towards presenting multiple and even opposing viewpoints, as this helps students develop critical thinking and understanding. I am also glad that antisemitic material has been removed. There is no room for hateful and divisive material in a model ethnic studies program!

I am still quite concerned about a number of issues in the proposed second draft of the ESMC.

1] **A general, core problem remains:** The curriculum still retains parts of the one-sided political ideology that spawned the first draft which was quite divisive. Some of this material is based on the book *Education at War*. ***We do not want material that views schools and education as battlegrounds.*** While the commission has removed the most egregious examples of this ideology, it is unfortunately still embedded in parts of the curriculum, and even more so in many of the references/links.

I urge you to make significant further revisions to the ESMC to address these concerns. Please revise the Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC to use more precise and inclusive terminology, to ***align with the ESMC Guidelines, to build bridges of intergroup understanding, and to ensure critical thinking.*** The Los Angeles Schools Ethnic study program is a good model. It will be a lot of work to review the material again to address this problem, but it is very important. ***We want our schools to be places where all students feel respected and supported, where they can learn more about themselves and others.***

2] **Specific problems remain regarding how Jews are described in the curriculum.** There are instances of probably inadvertent racial stereotypes, both in what is written and what is omitted.

There is no mention of Jews of color nor of Jews from North Africa and the Mideast [Sephardic, Mizrahi and Iranian], who make up a significant proportion of California Jews. The curriculum assumes the stereotype that Jews are European/white, rather than accurately portraying the multiplicity of faces in the Jewish community.

There is little material that acquaints the student with aspects of Jewish -American experience and culture.

An example of a section where Jews are assumed to be white and of European descent is the section on Jewish and Irish people. This does not inform students about either of these ethnicities, it only says that once they were discriminated against and now, supposedly, they are not. [Did you hear the anti-Semitic chants in Charlottesville by torch-bearing white supremacists?] This section of the curriculum may be trying to highlight the important issue that bigotry is a social construction, but this important issue is not clearly expressed, and there is little information given about the experiences of Irish and Jewish people in the U.S.

As a California-born resident, and as a Jew with other ethnicities [Mexican- and African-American] part of my family, it is important to me that ES be accurate, inclusive and help students appreciate their own culture and those of others. This can foster a constructive pride and self-awareness as well as an understanding and appreciation of others.

I would urge the commission to look carefully at the Los Angeles Schools Ethnic study program to see how it addresses the issues I and others are raising. This may give greater perspective on how the first draft proposed for the California ESMC still permeates this second draft, and may offer solutions that are better for our students.

Thank you so much for your attention and your ongoing work,  
Esther Brass-Chorin

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