

From: Karl Koessel

Sent: Friday, September 18, 2020 2:18 AM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Revised Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

On behalf of ADL's (Anti-Defamation League) five California offices, I write to comment on the revised Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) released on July 31. ADL endorses the teaching of Ethnic Studies and was an early supporter of Assembly Bill 331 (Medina). Adding Ethnic Studies to California's high school curriculum will, among other things, foster respect between students and an appreciation for our nation's rich and diverse history.

Founded in 1913 in response to an escalating climate of antisemitism and bigotry, ADL has since become a leading anti-hate organization. Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bigotry as we seek to create a more just and inclusive society. Our ultimate goal is a world in which no group or individual suffers from bias, discrimination or hate. ADL welcomes the removal of overt antisemitism and extreme and gratuitous anti-Israel bias from the revised ESMC draft. In addition, we are grateful that the new draft recognizes antisemitism as a form of historical and continuing bigotry.

The new ESMC could be further improved, however. For example, we recommend the curriculum include a definition of antisemitism. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition and contemporary examples are well-regarded. As respected experts, ADL refers to it explicitly in our guide Antisemitism Uncovered (<https://antisemitism.adl.org/>) and more broadly in our resources and lesson plans on antisemitism. Similarly, the U.S. State Department has used this definition since 2010, along with the European Union and others. The definition may be found at www.state.gov/defining-anti-semitism.

Moreover, we suggest that the ESMC recognize that the American Jewish community includes people of color and that many Jewish Americans trace their family roots to the Middle East and North Africa. For example, we draw your attention to a suggested lesson plan entitled "Irish and Jewish Americans: Redefining White and American." The title and description give the impression that American Jews are uniformly of European descent and as such have all attained "white identity" and "racial privilege," to quote the lesson plan. It is an ironic conclusion as white supremacists explicitly reject the "whiteness" of any Jew. Indeed, their hate-filled worldview sees Jews as a critical player in the destruction of the "white race." Failing to acknowledge the ethnic diversity of the Jewish community will mislead students about the complexity of contemporary Jewish identity and the hatred targeting Jews.

In general, the ESMC would benefit from an overarching statement similar to the Los Angeles Unified School District's "Elements of a Balanced Curriculum." As stated in its introduction:

At the college and university level, ethnic studies and related courses are sometimes taught from a specific political point of view or frame of reference. In K-12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically and form their own opinions on these and other issues.

Such guidance is a useful tool in addressing this complex subject.

Finally, we are pleased to see that the ESMC includes ADL's educational programming in the Lesson Resources for educators. ADL Education Division professionals work tirelessly to develop lessons that "promote[] critical thinking and learning around historical and current events topics through the lens of diversity, bias and social justice."

We are pleased that our materials can be a resource to California students and teachers.

As we wrote in August, a pedagogically sound Ethnic Studies course incorporating "core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations"⁵ will enrich California students' understanding of American history and current events. The revised ESMC is a significant step towards achieving that goal. We look forward to following the ESMC review process and providing additional comment, as warranted.

Thank you for your attention to my opinion.

Sincerely,

Karl Koessel