

**From:** Andrew Lachman

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 30, 2020 10:31 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Democrats for Israel California comments on Ethnic Studies

Democrats for Israel California (DFI\_CA) is a chartered organization of Jewish Democratic Clubs across California. Democrats for Israel Los Angeles was a strong supporter for Superintendent Thurmond race for the position and appreciates his concern and dedication to inclusive and supportive education policies that better our students.

**DFI-CA strongly supports Ethnic Studies as an important means to represent the voices of California's diverse populations and was in agreement with the California Department of Education's stated commitment to focus on the four traditional groups for whom Ethnic Studies was originally constituted: African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and Latin Americans.**

We are disappointed that this commitment was not kept and that some groups of approximately equal populations were included while others like Indian-Americans, Armenian-Americans, Iranian/Persian-Americans and Korean Americans were excluded.

We fully support the inclusion of Arab Americans alongside other Middle Eastern, North African, Armenian and Indian Americans in the Asian American section, as well as the inclusion of Korean-Americans and Pacific Islanders - we should work out these issues moving forward as Ethnic Studies continues to roll out over the next couple of years.

**In the immediate term, however, we are concerned that insufficient safeguards against antisemitic material are in place and recommend the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Guidelines and Examples on Antisemitism as a means to address this.** Recommended materials include works referencing to all Jews as indistinguishable from European populations and narratives that would seek to characterize Jewish rights to self-determination as an act of imperialist colonialism.

These guidelines have been adopted by the European Union and over 30 countries including Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and Argentina. The United States Department of State has been using these guidelines to identify antisemitism since 2016 and in the last year the U.S. Department of Education, numerous local governments and Florida State University, Arizona State University and numerous school boards have adopted these guidelines.

These guidelines protect free speech while creating safe spaces for Jewish students:

**"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."**

The guidelines go on to cite nuanced examples of problematic speech such as blaming Jews for all the problems of the world, questioning patriotic loyalties of Jews generally, denying the existence or scope of the Holocaust or claiming Jews have unusual influence or financial power. These examples are hardly controversial and leave plenty of space for reasoned fair criticism of individuals and governments involving Jewish individuals.

Notably, the guidelines do not prohibit criticism of Israel or, for that matter, Jews in their conduct as individuals. Thus while denying that Jews have the same right of determination as anyone else, saying Jews are collectively responsible for Israel's actions or that Israel's very existence (as opposed to specific policies) is racist is problematic, it makes clear that calling out Israel for conduct inconsistent with that of other democratic nations is most definitely not antisemitism.

We hope that the Superintendent will utilize through his own changes or signing statements these IHRA guidelines to ensure that a good idea (Ethnic Studies) moves forward without encouraging hate or divisions against Jewish students (intentionally or inadvertently) while inclusion issues are resolved in the long term.