

**From:** Samantha Yawitz

**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 9:26 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Include Antisemitism and the Middle Eastern-American Experience in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Department of Education,

My name is Samantha, and I am a concerned student of LAUSD in Los Angeles, California. I am also a Middle Eastern and European young Jewish woman. My grandparents and mother are Mizrahi Jews who fled Iran during the revolution in January of 1979. They took just a couple of suitcases of personal possessions and left everything behind because they were scared of physical antisemitic persecution. There had been antisemitism in Iran in many forms. They were now worried that their lives were in serious danger. While they were waiting in Paris to be able to enter the United States, my grandfather learned that his work partner, also Jewish, had been executed by the new regime. His fears were not unfounded.

I am also a Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jew with family from Greece, Turkey, and Ukraine on my father's side. All of my family who did not leave Greece and Turkey perished in the Holocaust, erasing entire branches of our family tree.

I appreciate your efforts to improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. One way I can help you improve it to be the high quality, inclusive, and impactful program that you envision is by sharing a little of my mother's experience as a Middle Eastern Jewish immigrant and ask that you see her and the others that reside here in California, and include their experience in the Curriculum. My mother identifies as one of the 500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage who have been ignored so far in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum. As an American Jew who has the ability to celebrate Persian, Greek, Turkish, and Ukrainian traditions, I am proud to be an American, proud to be Jewish, and proud of my Middle Eastern and European heritage. For AB 2016 to achieve its objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," my Iranian, Jewish community and other Middle Eastern communities in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The fact that the primary reference to Jews in the revised Curriculum is in the context of our communities being the beneficiaries of white privilege is laughable, if it weren't so willfully blind and bigoted. The Middle Eastern Jewish community in California is comprised of people from different countries, backgrounds, cultures and colors. Members of my community experienced antisemitism in Iran, and members of our communities have experienced xenophobia and antisemitism in California. Having an "ethnic studies" curriculum in California and not including adequate instruction about people from the Middle East, Jewish people and antisemitism makes no sense. If you were to walk into LAUSD schools when they are in session, you would see many students from our communities. Please include them in the Curriculum.

I am specifically asking that the Curriculum be further revised to include the following:

1. All references to Middle Eastern people in the Curriculum should include, specifically name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Iranians and other minority groups from the Middle East, who are asking for inclusion.
2. The next draft should include the lesson plan, "Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews" produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, to provide students with quality instruction on antisemitism, bigotry and the Middle Eastern-American experience.

3. The Curriculum should make clear that the umbrella of Asian Studies includes Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent approximately 60% of California's MENA population.

Please see us and include us.

Best,

Samantha