

From: Clyde Leland

Sent: Wednesday, November 11, 2020 11:40 AM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>; Superintendent <Superintendent@cde.ca.gov>; lindadh@suse.stanford.edu

Cc: info@araborganizing.org

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

I write to comment on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, and to protest the Department's acquiescence to political pressure that will harm the children and the future of California. As a Jewish parent and grandparent, I strongly object to the definitions of antisemitism that condemn criticism of the state of Israel. The insertion of that definition into any part of the curriculum shows that the political pressure the DOE caved into was about support for Israel, which has NOTHING to do with Ethnic Studies. Because I want my children and grandchildren to understand their place in California, the United States and the world as Jews, I want them to understand the history of the Palestinian people. I certainly don't want their school teaching them that their parents and grandparents are antisemitic because we oppose injustice.

A couple years ago, recognizing the need to promote understanding among different ethnic groups, the Department appointed a commission of experts in the field of Ethnic Studies, whose Guiding Principles included the notion that we promote that understanding not by acting as if we are all the same, but by learning to recognize and respect our differences. Thus, the curriculum that the expert commission drafted included separate lesson plans that would discuss the history of different groups. The Department's overhaul of their proposal blurs the distinction between groups, rejecting the discipline of ethnic studies for a multicultural approach.

Just how unaware of what's going on in this county is the DOE? For it's not only the experts who drafted the original proposal who reject this all-lives-matter approach, but the nationwide Black Lives Matter movement is precisely about the need to recognize the history and situation of each ethnic group, not to act as if there are no differences. Indeed, the denial of the differences among us is precisely what Trump's order prohibiting diversity training was about. They lost . . . because of racist policies like that.

Most importantly, there is no pedagogical theory behind the changes that have been proposed. Instead, they are political changes that simply jettison years of hard work by experts in the field, at least partly because you making these decisions have been tricked into thinking there were things in the original proposal that were "antisemitic." There were factual descriptions of conditions in Israel and Palestine and of a peaceful, legal, non-violent response to violations of international law (i.e., Boycott Divestment and Sanctions), but talking about Israel's apartheid policies is no more antisemitic than saying borscht stains: it's a statement of fact about something that many people associate with Jews.

I say the decision-makers have been “tricked” because the overhauled curriculum includes the skewed definition of antisemitism, and thus, the Catch-22 is that opposing the overhaul is branded as antisemitic because it rejects the definition. It’s not. Similarly, those supporters of Israel’s government who demanded the changes pretend they speak for the Jewish community. They don’t. They don’t speak for me, that’s for sure, or for the thousands of other Californians who belong to Jewish Voice for Peace. Indeed, every survey of American Jews confirms that most condemn the illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

Until there is a panel of experts in the field supporting this overhaul that is as distinguished as the one that drafted the original curriculum, there is no justification for the changes. There should be an Arab-American lesson plan in the body of the curriculum, not relegated to an afterthought in the appendix, and that study should include discussion of Palestine and Palestinians.

Sincerely,
Clyde Leland