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To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] ESCM Concerns

My name is Jaden Penhaskashi and I am a Persian Jewish high school student at The Science Academy STEM Magnet and I am in my second term as President of my school.

Entire ethnic groups who make up a sizable portion of CA's population, specifically in Los Angeles, have been excluded from previous drafts, mine included. Jews from the Middle East like my family were never mentioned, even though we fled our homes because of antisemitism and still face antisemitism today in Los Angeles, which houses the largest population of persian jews in the United States!

The exclusion of these stories coupled with the current rise of antisemitism makes for a dangerous future for Jewish students. I am extremely thankful at the moment that the CDE has made countless recommendations that would further involve the Jewish community and culture in the proposed curriculum. However, there are certain things we need to all advocate for and push at that otherwise may not be able to come into fruition within the proposed curriculum.

I am extremely hopeful for the inclusion for Mizrachi jews in the curriculum, especially those who experienced oppression within their own communities. Myself and many fellow persian jewish teens have seen first-hand how naive the majority of our classmates are to the history and culture of Mizrahi jews. Ironically, just the other day, I had a classmate I was speaking to ask me if my parents converted to Judaism in Iran. Although this was a harmless curiosity, this type of unawareness to the Mizrachi experience and the antisemitism our culture was faced with in the Middle East and even now in Los Angeles can lead to further antisemitism because ignorance will just give antisemitism more room to grow. And as we know, history *will* repeat itself unless our generation learns from it.

As a freshman, I founded a Jewish and Israeli Culture Club within my school in order to further educate my friends and classmates on Judaism and the concept of Israel to break the stereotypes that I had seen formed in my community. However, I was shocked to see that the majority of my classmates lacked even a basic understanding of the diversity of the Jewish community with some of them not even knowing about the Holocaust. I made it my goal to further educate them

of Jewish culture and just recently had a discussion with them where we read some of the first person narratives of hardships that Mizrahi Jews faced. On top of this, I have only heard Jews mentioned once throughout my eleven and a half years of schooling where my history teacher had simply said they had incorrect beliefs. It was then where I realized that if any antisemitic topics are implemented in curriculum, the majority of students would be ignorant towards the other side, whether it's intentional or not.

I hope the recommendation to include my community will be approved, but I'm also concerned by the response from some of the groups involved in this issue. In the first draft, the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement was included. This movement calls for the removal of Israel, which as a Jewish person is my homeland. While the CDE is supporting safeguards against this hate, activists who support BDS are now pressuring to put it back in. They're also demanding that Arab Americans get special treatment in the curriculum, above Sikhs, Armenians, Koreans, and Jewish students like me. I think it would be extremely problematic to treat all of our communities unequally in the ESMC.

I also wanted to emphasize something that I saw proposed that I think is extremely important to be included in the curriculum, which is a comprehensive definition of antisemitism. If antisemitism is defined early on in the curriculum so that both educators and students have a better understanding of what it consists of, it can act as its own safeguard, demonstrating to those in the classroom what to watch out for. Please see what you can do to further protect teens like me in the near future!