

From: Marianne Smith
Sent: Thursday, October 1, 2020 12:00 AM
To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>; [email redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic studies curriculum

To: Shanine Coats, Executive Director, IQC, CDE
Jose Iniguez, Chair, IQC
California Ethnic Studies Curriculum committee members
Tony Thurmond, Supt. of Instruction
From: Marianne Smith
California voter and parent
re: CA Ethnic Studies curriculum revisions

Thank you for your work on the IQC to ensure that California students have access to quality curriculum materials in all subject areas. I am familiar with the structure of materials review, having worked in mathematics education in the 1990's. I knew many teachers who served voluntarily on the committees and attended many meetings where reviews were carefully discussed and the public was allowed to contribute opinions and suggestions to the committee.

Imagine that I have signed up to speak to the California Ethnic Studies Curriculum committee at a regularly scheduled meeting. I will tell you this: I am very pleased that this curriculum is being designed for our K-12 system; however, I am also disappointed in the limited scope of the content. We have so many different communities and schools in our state. Since the original idea for Ethnic Studies emerged at SF State (I am an alum) in the late 1960's, the population has grown and changed. The original grouping of ethnic studies was created in order to reflect the population at the time whose history and traditions were not included in the standard university curriculum.

With this curriculum, designed for pre-university students, I think that the nature of the population represented in the curriculum needs to be expanded.

For example, we now have in California a group of Jewish people who emigrated from Iran and other countries in the Middle East to escape discrimination and persecution during the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Other groups of Jewish people emigrated as survivors of the Nazi genocide during World War II. No doubt you

are aware that antisemitism is at a record high in the US, and in California, it continues to be a serious problem. As a Jewish-American, I believe that California students need to be aware of this deadly prejudice, and

understand that the myths surrounding prejudice about Jewish people, grouping them into one, undifferentiated category, has lethal consequences.

I have marched in the streets, protested and campaigned on behalf of racial equality in our country, and in our state. I have worked to advocate curriculum materials that are accessible to all students, regardless of socio-economic background or ethnicity. I believe that the same principles should apply to an ethnic studies curriculum intended to increase all students' sensitivities to each other's particular cultural and historical background.

My grandparents came to the US to escape the murderous pogroms in Russia. I believe that my families' tradition of being supportive and sympathetic to the struggles of African-Americans as well as Latino-Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans are based on our own awareness of the toxic, dehumanizing effects of antisemitism.

In addition, I urge you to consider inclusion of the Armenians who are part of our state, descendants of those who fled their country in 1915, eventually emigrating to the US as a result of mass killing by the Ottoman Empire. All of these California citizens whose children, grand-children and great-grand children have distinctive ethnicities and important stories to add to the mosaic of the heritage of California.

"Today, historians are pushing to correct [distortions and omissions](#) of America's historical record. That's a worthy goal for educators, but it could fail if it heightens social tensions, " writes Andrea Gabor, education author and former editor at Business Week and U.S. News & World Report.

(<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/california-ethnic-studies-plan-undercuts-itself/ar-BB19Ag7H>)

Ms. Gabor has a point, which I hope you will consider. Please revise the Ethnic Studies curriculum to include our students in the exploration of the complexity of our population, and leads to an understanding of the need to encourage inclusion in all aspects of life in a democratic society.

Thank you for your kind consideration of my letter. I thank you again for your hard work in service of all our students.

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Marianne Smith
Writer & Consultant