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August 5, 2019

Ms. Soomin Chao
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Ms. Chao:

On behalf of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, we appreciate the work of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (MCAC) in producing a multi-chapter CA 2020 Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) draft. We greatly value the opportunity to comment on this draft. The enclosed review provides recommendations aimed at ensuring accuracy, inclusion, and pedagogical rigor for California's students. Given that AB-331 would make a one-semester high school Ethnic Studies course a requirement for graduation in California, we believe it is all the more important to ensure that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is of the highest quality and adheres to California values, standards, and law.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, one of the largest international Jewish organizations, with over 400,000 national member families, is the only major Jewish organization headquartered in California. Our renowned Museum of Tolerance has attracted and continues to attract world leaders, numerous US presidents, kings and prime ministers. In June, we hosted the president of Germany, H.E. Hans Walter Steinmeier. The Simon Wiesenthal Center is seen as a moral voice that speaks to justice and human rights. It also hosts hundreds of thousands of California students and works closely with many California school districts.

We appreciate the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Guidelines, which set high standards of quality, accuracy, and inclusion for the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. However, the content and pedagogy of the current draft of the ESMC does not adhere to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Guidelines that require the curriculum to:

“Be written in language that is inclusive and supportive of multiple users”

“Encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together, highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as consciousness raising and knowledge building, identity development and self-determination, justice and social change, and love, respect”

“Be inclusive by creating space for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or citizenship to learn different perspectives”

We appreciated the exuberance of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee, whose meetings began with a unity chant. Unfortunately, that spirit did not translate into the draft, where we found content that is dis-unifying, exclusionary, and, at times, even delegitimizing. We ask that the IQC address these matters before sending the draft to the Board of Education for approval.

The latest California History-Social Science Framework directs that instructional content maintain academic rigor, historical accuracy, and consistency. The body of knowledge presented in classrooms should not be prejudicial, and must be balanced, so that our students can develop the reasoning, problem-solving, communication, and analytical thinking skills necessary for the future. The model curriculum must adhere to California Education Code sections 60044 and 51500, which explicitly prohibit instructional materials and instruction that reflect or promote discriminatory bias on “the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, nationality, or sexual orientation, occupation.” At present, due to errors of omission and commission, the current ESMC draft threatens both sections of the Education Code for Jewish American students.



The Simon Wiesenthal Center is grateful to you, the members of the Instructional Quality Commission, for your commitment to accurate and representative education for all California students. We appreciate your timely attention to this matter. We look forward to participating in the process and appreciate the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Abraham Cooper,
Associate Dean, Director Global Social Action
Simon Wiesenthal Center

Cc: Cliff Berg