

P. O. Box 7655
Menlo Park, CA
9/3/19

Mr. Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-0800

Dear Mr. Thurmond –

If the attached article is accurate, I am completely opposed to the proposed ethnic studies curriculum in its current form. I'm pretty liberal, but this seems way too far left by exclusion – Per Dan Walters, with whom I don't always agree, the proposed program clearly needs better context. I'm amazed that the Assembly went ahead and voted – not knowing the proposed contents of the program – to make it mandatory and a graduation requirement...! I understand Assembly Bill 331 is now pending in the Senate. I hope the Senate defeats it. I don't know what you can do to turn this around, but please try!

Sincerely,



Barbara Kaiser

State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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Other Views

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

State's ethnic studies political time bomb explodes

By Dan Walters
CalMatters

State legislators and then-Gov. Jerry Brown should have known that they were lighting the fuse of a political time bomb three years ago when they ordered up a "model curriculum in ethnic studies" for high school students.

The bomb is now exploding. The state Department of Education has released a 363-page draft of undecipherable educational jargon and left-wing rhetoric, advocating the indoctrination of teenagers into believing that everyone who isn't white and male is an oppressed victim.

That thrust is quite evident in the draft's description of its intention, to wit:

"At its core, the field of ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with an emphasis on the experiences of people of color in the United States," adding, "The field critically grapples with the various power structures and forms of oppression, including, but not limited to, white supremacy, race and racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, islamophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia, that continue to impact the social, emotional, cultural, economic, and political experiences of Native People(s) and people of color."

In critiquing "systems of power," it advises, "These are structures that have the capacity to control circumstances within economic, political, and/or social-cultural contexts. These systems are often controlled by those in power and go on to determine how society is organized and functions," adding, "some examples of systems of power are: white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy." And so forth.

The draft reiterates these themes group-by-group, advising teachers on how best to inculcate their impressionable students, and includes direct political propagandizing, such as citing President Donald Trump's policies as examples of subjugation.

As the draft was released for public comment, criticism emerged.

The generally liberal Los Angeles Times editorial page, for instance, concluded, "Though the draft ... offers many interesting ideas, it is in bad need of an overhaul. The final curriculum should emphasize the deep, disturbing and complex facts of racial and ethnic history, respecting differences of opinion, and encouraging open discussion on an often difficult subject."

Some of the sharpest dissent is coming from the Legislature's Jewish caucus, all Democrats.



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The author of the 2016 ethnic studies curriculum bill, then-Assemblyman Luis Alejo, described it as aimed at making high school social studies more accurate and "an integral part of cultivating a classroom environment that is accepting of diverse cultures."

In a July 29 letter to state education officials, the caucus took umbrage about the draft's section on "Islamophobia," saying, "we cannot support a curriculum that erases the American Jewish experience, fails to discuss anti-semitism, reinforces negative stereotypes about Jews, singles out Israel for criticism and would institutionalize the teaching of anti-semitic stereotypes in our public schools."

All members of the Jewish caucus then in the Legislature voted for the 2016 bill requiring development of the ethnic studies curriculum. In fact, the votes for the bill were overwhelming and bipartisan, 60-19 in the Assembly and 32-5 in the Senate.

At the time, there was little controversy. Its author, then-Assemblyman Luis Alejo, described it as aimed at making high school social studies more

accurate and "an integral part of cultivating a classroom environment that is accepting of diverse cultures."

Ethnicity is a huge part of the nation's history and should be embedded in history and civics courses, including its darkest aspects, such as slavery, segregation, lynchings and the genocidal campaigns to erase native populations in California and elsewhere.

But it must be presented in context of America's largely successful experiment in offering opportunity and freedom to immigrants from everywhere — one that still attracts those willing to undergo hardship and danger.

At this point, the "model curriculum" is only a draft and must be approved by the state school board.

Current law does not require, but the Assembly — without knowing what the model curriculum would contain — voted in May to make its use mandatory and a requirement for high school graduation. The bill, Assembly Bill 331, is now pending in the Senate.

Until, and unless, it is made more contextually accurate, that would be a huge mistake.

Dan Walters is a *CalMatters* columnist.