

From: Ken Usher
Sent: Monday, December 21, 2020 5:27 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Sirs,

I understand one of the goals of the model curriculum is to "build the capacity for every young Californian to develop a social consciousness." From what I've read, the proposals you are advocating will fail that charge completely.

Your curriculum presents a portrait of America as a racist country in which ethnic minorities cannot possibly succeed. Not having been part of the development of the model curriculum, I do not know what factual proof you have produced to come up with this claim. I do not know if this so-called proof has been rigorously been examined and debated by professional historians. If you have no proof, then we are left only with opinions and outright advocacy for a specific agenda, and those have no place in a program that will guide teachers and students in the future. It will also severely curtail chances for any teacher and district to select materials that provide clear and balanced factual representations of the historical record.

I taught social studies in the Los Angeles Unified School district for 39 years. Prior to that I was earning a bachelors and masters in History. One of the constant warnings, if you will, from our professors is that it is impossible to make accurate judgments about historical events hundreds or thousands of years after they have occurred. One professor liked to tell us that "If you look at the 1860s with the mind set of the 1960s, you will never truly understand the period."

In my years in the district, despite its many faults, we did receive a lot of training in ethnic studies. In fact my department created our own ethnic studies course of study in the 1970s. and used it for many years. That does not mean we never changed anything. As we became exposed to new methodologies and research, we made adjustments.

But we kept on thing in mind. The children in our student population did not need any more negative reinforcement than they already faced from society at large. We concentrated on why they should be proud of their ethnic heritage. We had them concentrate on learning about the positive contributions of their people to American Society at large. We had them seek out heroes and everyday people from their particular ethnic group who had struggled, sometimes failed, and often succeeded. We wanted these students to be proud of who they are, and how their ancestors and contemporaries helped strengthen the American nation.

We did not hide the negative aspects of our history. They learned about slavery. They investigated the attacks on Native American culture. They were made aware of the anti-immigrant policies of so many city, state and national governments. They studied the civil rights movement and how it was at that very time transforming our society. We thoroughly examined the role of women throughout the historical record. When students asked us why things were so bad, we told them that these problems had existed among the entire human race since the beginning of time. When we were asked for solutions, we admitted we were not miracle workers.

We told them that the solutions would have to come from them, and their actions. This is not just a problem for the American people to deal with. it is an unfinished project for human kind.

If you develop a model curriculum that starts from the premise that we are a failed society, it will make it nigh impossible for students to see any hope for the future. It will let them believe it is okay to tear down the stature of a famous person who made positive changes in our society. Were those changes major enough for our modern sensibilities? Most likely not. But as my professors said, "We cannot accurately discover the past by looking at it with modern eyes."

I encourage you to not present any model curriculum that has not been vigorously examined and debated by the people of this state. Do not continue to make the mistake so many government agencies do. They argue that, because they are official, they have the correct answer to everything.

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth Usher
[email redacted]