



August 13, 2019

By Email Only:

Soomin Chao

Chair, Instructional Quality Commission

To Chairperson Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

We are writing as Executive Board members of Congregation Beth David, a Jewish congregation in San Luis Obispo, CA., to express our strong concerns about the current draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). The authorizing legislation includes the admirable goal that students gain "...an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures." We believe that the ESMC must be inclusionary and un-biased. The present draft of the ESMC is both exclusionary and biased.

The story of the contributions of the Jewish citizens of San Luis Obispo over the last 150 years provides an excellent example of why the concept of an un-biased, inclusionary curriculum is so important for ethnic studies. The first Jewish immigrants in San Luis Obispo established family run businesses, helped bring the railroad to San Luis Obispo, and incorporated Jewish values into the every day life of San Luis Obispo. The Oct. 1, 1870 edition of the San Luis Obispo Telegram Tribune states "... the Hebrews of San Luis Obispo celebrated their New Year on Monday and Tuesday of this week. All their stores were closed and it appeared as though the whole life of the town was gone....We were never so much impressed with the weight of this class of our fellow citizens...." The first Jewish mayor of San Luis Obispo, Luis Sinsheimer, served from 1919-1939 and was known for helping immigrants, improving local infrastructure, and was instrumental in establishing a city-wide fiesta to help raise funds to rebuild Mission San Luis Obispo after a fire. (Sources, J. Ashbaugh, Jewish Museum of the American West.) San Luis Obispo is a model for multiple ethnic groups understanding one another and working together for the good of the entire community. The proposed ESMC curriculum would discourage understanding and cooperation such as this. Instead it will fuel anti-Semitism.

The current draft of the ESMC reflects an anti-Jewish bias in its proposed language. It omits any meaningful discussion of anti-Semitism, even including a blatant anti-Semitic stereotype of Jewish control of the media. (ESMC P. 268-69) The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) states that “Words or actions related to the State of Israel are anti-Semitic when they...single out Israel in denying the country’s right to exist as a Jewish State...(or)use anti-Jewish stereotypes or conspiracy theories...” The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has no place in this ethnic studies curriculum. (ESMC P. 242) The reference to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement is not appropriate for an unbiased curriculum. (ESMC Glossary). The ADL believes that the founding goals and many of the strategies of the BDS movement are anti-Semitic. (file:///C:/Users/rich/Documents/CBD Board/ADL/BDS%20 The Global Campaign to Delegitimize Israel.htm)

It is evident that a curriculum designed to teach an appreciation of the contributions of diverse and dynamic ethnic groups, will in fact, have the opposite effect--increasing bigotry, marginalizing the contributions of Jewish citizens, normalizing anti-Semitism, pulling our students apart instead of increasing understanding. We urge you and the members of the Instructional Quality Commission to revise this curriculum, remove anti-Semitic language and politically biased references to the State of Israel, and include a discussion of anti-Semitism. Give the students of our state a fair, unbiased curriculum that brings the citizens of our great, multi-ethnic state together.

Sincerely, On behalf of the Executive Board,

R. Beller

Richard Beller