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## **Agudath Israel of California**

August 8, 2019

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

To Chairwoman Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

My name is Dr. Irving Lebovics and I am writing on behalf of Agudath Israel of California, a Jewish advocacy group, to express our extreme dismay over the proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) that is currently before your Commission.

Agudath Israel of California has been active in the State since 1984, sponsoring six pieces of legislation that have been signed into law as well as being involved in countless other initiatives dealing with religious freedom, education, community welfare, and support for the State of Israel.

In 2016 we were one of the sponsors of the California Combating BDS Act which passed both Houses of the Legislature with near unanimity and was signed into law by Governor Brown. We also led a group that filed a complaint against the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2017 when groups of public-school students were taken to a modernized performance of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* set in the Middle East and in which Israeli soldiers were depicted indiscriminately stabbing and killing Palestinian children. The organizers of this play, in a teary meeting, claimed to have no knowledge of the content of the production and immediately closed it down, this after more than one hundred students had already seen it.

As you can see, we are quite familiar with back door attempts to infiltrate the California education system with one sided anti-Israel rhetoric that promotes only hate and division.

Our organization strongly supports the concept embodied in AB331, to teach our children about diversity and respect and tolerance toward all ethnic groups. A curriculum that has no mention of anti-Semitism or recognition of the

history and contributions of Jews in California, does not fulfill this charge. One that perpetuates the hate and division of the BDS movement, misrepresents the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and singles out only the Jewish State for criticism, is cause for deep concern.

In 2016, the State of California clearly repudiated the goals of the BDS movement, yet this curriculum teaches it as a positive value (Glossary page 2 and Chapter 2 page 234). The curriculum promotes only the Palestinian version of the Middle East conflict, with no mention of Palestinian terrorism, corruption, and hate rhetoric (Chapter 2 page 234). It teaches only the Arab perspective of the 1948 War of Independence with no mention of the United Nations Partition Plan or the Arab instigation of the conflict with threats to drive the Jews into the sea (Chapter 2 page 242). It discusses Arab refugees, with no mention of the over 400,000 Jewish refugees whose property, businesses and belongings were taken from them as they were forcibly expelled from Arab countries at the very same time (Chapter 2 page 242). The curriculum even contains an anti-Israel poem as suggested teaching material (Chapter 2 pages 264-269).

There is no mention of the active Jewish community in California, many of whose members are survivors or children of survivors of the worst Holocaust in human history, and how much they have contributed to our State in so many different fields. At a time when we are witnessing a rise in anti-Semitism and white supremacy (note the recent Poway shootings), wouldn't it make sense to include the story of the Jewish People in California as part of this diversity curriculum as well?

Agudath Israel of California strongly endorses curricula that "...enable students to develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate and racism" (Introduction). The current curriculum draft only encourages the bigotry and prejudice felt by many Jewish students on California college campuses today and fosters anti-Semitism and hatred against the Jewish community in general. Let us all participate in rewriting this document so that it might accomplish the lofty goals envisioned by authors of AB331.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Lebovics', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr. Irving Lebovics

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Chairman, Agudath Israel of California

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