

From: Alessandra Judaken
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 4:45 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Revise the ESMC

To the Board Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

My name is Alessandra Judaken and I am a senior in high school in Los Angeles. I have been raised in Los Angeles my entire life and my family deliberately chooses to continue residing here because of the city's priorities of diversity and inclusion that they never experienced in the countries they are from. In my mom's homeland of Guatemala, she grew up not ever knowing a Jew or anything about the Jewish people. There was no mention of the Jewish people in their textbooks whatsoever. Meanwhile, my dad now fears going back to South Africa as the president has pushed extreme antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric onto his citizens.

Unfortunately, the first draft of the ESMC promoted a very similar agenda to that of my parents' birth countries. After reviewing the new draft, I am saddened to still see the exclusion of many ethnic minority groups, including Jews, and guiding values that implicitly encourage bias and hateful narratives against Jews and Israel in schools.

I would like to believe that the ESMC was revised with good intent, but the new version still falls short.

I would like to share a story with you. A few years back, I attended my cousin's birthday party where she invited her family and friends. As she blew out her birthday candles, one of her friends pointed towards my Star of David necklace and yelled "YOU ARE JEW!" Once we cut the cake, I was tasked with explaining what a Jew is and how I, a person of color, can also be Jewish. I can guarantee that an Irish American does not have to assure people that they don't have horns or that their ancestry did not kill Jesus. However, as a Jew, I know I have to and I know I have to endure all the hate that comes with being a Jew. That being said, in Appendix A, Jews are grouped with Irish Americans and labeled as two peoples who are "gaining racial privilege." Not only does this gross and false generalization downplay ongoing white supremacist hostility and violence against the Jewish people, but it also disregards the diversity of the American Jewish community. It erases my own lived experiences.

Education within schools is the foundation of a person's success in life, as you already know. I would argue that this education needs to provide an accurate narrative and history off all people including Hindus, Sikhs, Koreans, Armenians, Jews(including Mizrahi Jews and Jews of color), and other Middle Eastern minority groups.

I appreciate the revisions that removed explicit anti-Israel and antisemitic content. I now urge you to revise once more to eliminate the underlying anti-Israel and antisemitic narratives from the guiding values of the new ESMC and to trulyinclude Jewish students like me.

I urge you to accept revisions to the ESMC that will:

1. Include diverse Jewish experiences and accurately define antisemitism in all its forms.
2. Treat Middle Eastern communities equally. This means adding the lesson plan submitted by JIMENA in the same section as the one about Arab Americans.
3. Change "Guiding Values and Principles" which can and will be used to justify bringing hate and bias into our classrooms.

I also urge you to reject:

1. Recommendations to exclude or edit down any definition of antisemitism to the point where it no longer reflects the experiences of Jewish students (i.e. by removing references to the fact that anti-Israel rhetoric can and does descend into hate speechagainst Jews far too often).
2. Pressure to give Arab Americans a special place in the curriculum above Jews, Armenians, Sikhs, Koreans or others. These communities should be treated equally.
3. Demands that you vote against changes that encourage critical thinking, rather than one-sided political agendas in the curriculum. It is crucial to include guidelines that will help prevent hatred and bias in our schools.

Thank you,

Alessandra Judaken