

From: Lisa Mark

Sent: Sunday, August 9, 2020 4:11 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Cc: marc.berman@asm.ca.gov; ruth.ferguson@asm.ca.gov; jerry.hill@sd13.senate.ca.gov

Subject: [EXTERNAL] ESMC Version 2 - Still Greatly Flawed

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

I appreciate that there has been some small improvement in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), but I am still extremely concerned, upset, and, frankly, disgusted by the very flawed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum version 2. And I honestly cannot believe we still need to have this conversation.

As a California resident and as a parent of two daughters, I am extremely disturbed about the misrepresentation of Jews and other ethnic groups and the imposition of a one-sided political ideology rooted not at all in fact but rather in misinformation and prejudice. I grew up in an extremely anti-Semitic environment and I was subjected to anti-Semitic narratives from a very young age. It would be an absolute travesty for current students and young adults to be subjected to what I had to endure growing up. California can and should do better.

These are my major concerns.

1. ESMC guiding values and principles need revision. They

- do not reflect California's shared values, nor the values laid out in AB 2016
- advocate a narrow political philosophy
- establish an "us vs them" agenda
- are partly based on the book *Education at War*, which encourages "solidarity" and "linkages" with BDS, anti-Semitism, and anti-Israel narratives. These are not only harmful to Jewish students; they are harmful to everyone because they express a skewed narrative that is political rather than purely indicative.

2. This second draft does NOT prevent teaching offensive politically indoctrinating and anti-Israel elements.

- In order to provide solid ground rules for course development, you need a Balanced Curriculum (as used in the LA Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Curriculum.)
- Numerous sections of the ESMC need revision to expose students to "multiple and often competing sources of information" and ensure that "diverse viewpoints are respected". These diverse viewpoints should include diverse viewpoints, and not just the viewpoints of those that hate Jews & Israel.

3. The few references the curriculum makes to Jews are misleading and offensive.

- Inclusivity means including Mizrahi and other Jews of color
- The curriculum needs to remove links to, and group advocacy of, virulently anti-Israel pro-BDS sites with malicious slander about imaginary genocide

- And you need to add a definition of anti-Semitism that addresses the sinister stereotyping and double standards against Jews and Jewish institutions from all parts of the political spectrum.

4. References to Middle Eastern communities should NOT favor one community over others.

- If Middle Eastern communities are considered Asian, then under the “broadly defined umbrella of Asian studies” so are Mizrahi Jews and other MENA ethnic groups, which represent ~60% of CA's MENA population (an estimated 500,000 Californians).
- The curriculum needs to include the lesson plan, “[Antisemitism as the Middle Eastern-American Jews](#),” covering contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience produced by the JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa.

5. The ESMC should be revised to represent accurately and equitably the cultural and racial diversity of California so it is balanced, as required by SBE standards and ESMC Guidelines

- If the curriculum represents religions, it should represent religious minorities proportionately (i.e. CA's non-Christian religions -- Buddhist (2%), Hindu (2%), Jewish (2%), and Muslim (1%)).
- If the ESMC includes ethnic groups from the Middle East, it should include Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern communities proportionately. For reference and to clarify your own questions please see the MENA [coalition letter](#) of communities which explains this in depth.

I urge you to make significant revisions to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to address these concerns. Please revise the Guiding Values and Principles of the ESMC to use more precise and inclusive terminology, to align with the ESMC Guidelines, to build bridges of intergroup understanding, and to ensure critical thinking. Then adjust the lessons and sample topics accordingly to match the revised principles.

Thank you,

Lisa Mark