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December 2, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1303 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
1430 N. Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom and Superintendent Thurmond,

We write with concern about the revision process for California's proposed ethnic studies model curriculum (ESMC) and urge you to press the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop this curriculum in the same open and transparent manner it does for all other instructional materials.

### **Shared Concerns**

Governor Newsom, you said in August that "we are united in our resolve to make sure the [ESMC] advisory committee draft is only that, a draft, that will be substantially amended," and that it "will never see the light of day."<sup>1</sup>

Superintendent Thurmond, you said in August that "greater balance was needed in the curriculum [and that] the CDE will pursue all options to correct the issues, including ...starting a new draft. Edits will be recommended with the potential of additional writers and ethnographers being utilized [and] all recommended revisions will be reviewed at the next IQC meeting on September 20, 2019."<sup>2</sup>

### **SBE and CDE's Promises**

State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond made similar comments and commitments in her August 8 letter in the *Los Angeles Times* and September 29 EdSource statement as did Deputy Superintendent Gregson in interviews this summer.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jweekly.com/2019/08/23/in-face-to-face-with-gov-newsom-strong-support-for-jewish-concerns/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr19/yr19rel57.asp>

Hearing these and others' concerns, on September 16 the CDE announced in a press release the next steps that *appeared* to be premised on an open, fair, and transparent process.<sup>3</sup> (See text of full press release below).

### **CDE's Actions and Inactions**

Last June, a month after the IQC instructed the CDE to release the draft ESMC for public comment, CDE posted it on a webpage embedded 4 levels into its website. CDE did not inform the public that it was seeking comments: it did not issue a press release, it did not post a notice in the "What's New" section of its website, and it did not post or Tweet about it in its social media feeds.

CDE advertised the public comment period only *after* the *Wall Street Journal* published a long, highly critical piece about the draft ESMC.

In the IQC's September 20 Agenda, the CDE initially set aside a full day (9 am to 5 pm) for "Discussion on the Draft ESMC" and the 20,245 comments IQC received. CDE cut it to a two hour "listening" session, precluding any meaningful public discussion or deliberation by the IQC.

We were surprised on October 10 to receive an IQC listserv notification informing us that CDE had selected "experts" who would hold a public discussion in Sacramento five days later and that only those attending in person (or who RSVPed in advance for a webcast) could observe. No video of the panel is publicly available.

We wrote to Superintendent Thurmond and Deputy Superintendent Gregson about the panel discussion the day it was announced. (See October 10 communication below.) Receiving no reply, three weeks later we sent another letter to them noting, in part, that all the panelists whom the CDE selected were individuals that recommended the first draft of the ESMC. (See November 1 communication below.) One of the six panelists, the ESMC Advisory Committee Co-Chair, shared that she is already teaching her students the draft ESMC and using its contents in the professional development sessions she leads. None of the panelists shared the concerns of, or addressed, the 20,000+ comments the IQC received.

Since CDE selected these panelists without public participation or input, AJC and our partners asked the CDE again for an open, transparent and fair process.

In her November 7 response to us, Deputy Superintendent Gregson did not address the lack of transparency but said that:

- CDE selected panelists who had "experience" with Ethnic Studies (demurring on the degree of their *expertise* in the subject matter).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr19/yr19rel62.asp>

- “WestEd is conducting feedback sessions with teachers and administrators [to] provide us with an opportunity to hear the resources needed for the successful implementation of an Ethnic Studies course or program” – i.e., these sessions will not assist in developing the draft ESMC content but rather speed its implementation.

By chance, on November 14 AJC learned from someone’s personal Twitter post that WestEd (i) asked the ESMC Advisory Committee members – whose work supposedly ended with the first draft of the ESMC – to return and participate in these feedback sessions, and (ii) privately invited others to nominate people to participate with a November 15 deadline. Inexplicably, Ms. Gregson failed to share any of this in her November 7 letter to us. The CDE also did not email the IQC listserv, did not post on its website, and did not inform its social media followers that nominations were being collected. These model curriculum advisory members crafted the controversial draft and, as a group, signed a petition pressing the CDE not to significantly change it.

### **Call To Action**

It is unfortunate that the CDE has employed a process that differs so substantially from its own instructional materials transparency and procedural rules. That, along with ignoring your direction and the 20,000+ comments that detail why the draft ESMC deeply concerns Californians, will most assuredly produce a flawed revised ESMC draft.

We urge you to press that the CDE treat the ESMC as seriously as it does the adoption of all other instructional materials -- with open and full transparency regarding its selection of experts and advisors and with open deliberations, ethical walls placed between the ESMC writers and its reviewers, published dates and deadlines, and videotaped sessions that are publicly available.

California high school students deserve an opportunity to learn the role of ethnicity, race, and religion in the life of all its citizens, including the backgrounds of the children whom the ESMC writers and advisory committee members ignored in the first ESMC draft.

Our students need a model curriculum in a subject as vital as this that has multicultural competency and nuance, does not advance a narrow scope of study, and does a service to California’s diverse population.

CDE’s current path will not address these deficiencies unless action is taken now.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



*Serena Eisenberg*  
*AJC Northern California Director*



*Richard S. Hirschhaut*  
*AJC Los Angeles Director*

CC:

*American Hellenic Council (AHC)*

*Armenian Assembly of America (AAA)*

*Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region (ANCA-WR)*

*Assyrian American Association of Southern California (AAASC)*

*FACE (Faith and Community Empowerment)*

*Hindu American Foundation (HAF)*

*Korean American Coalition (KAC)*

## The California Department of Education Outlines Path for Revising and Improving Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced today that the California Department of Education (CDE) has outlined a path to revise and improve the ethnic studies model curriculum draft.

The next step in the process is for the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to meet regarding the draft on Friday, September 20. The CDE is recommending that the IQC pause any action on the draft, take more time to revise the draft, and ultimately send it to the State Board of Education (SBE) for action in 2020.

Last week the California State Legislature approved AB 114, extending the timeline for completion of the ethnic studies model curriculum draft through March 2021. The bill now awaits Governor Newsom's signature. If the IQC acts to extend the timeline for completing the draft, the CDE anticipates taking the following steps:

- Holding feedback sessions with ethnic studies teachers, ethnologists, experts, and interested parties to get input on what might go into the draft.
- Consulting with ethnic studies experts on what might go into the draft including convening a panel discussion of experts.
- Holding listening sessions around the state to hear from the approximately 200 districts that have successfully implemented ethnic studies curriculums.

Dr. Shirley Weber, Assemblymember and IQC member, has agreed to serve on the ethnic studies panel and consult with the CDE and SBE staff to complete the model draft curriculum. Weber is a 40-year educator of Africana Studies who has helped establish ethnic studies in K–12 curriculum throughout the State of California.

To send suggestions for revisions to the curriculum, email [ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov](mailto:ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov). More information about the ethnic studies model curriculum can be found on the CDE [Model Curriculum Projects web page](#).

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**[Tony Thurmond](#) — State Superintendent of Public Instruction**  
**Communications Division, Room 5602, 916-319-0818, Fax 916-319-0100**

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**From:** Stephanie Gregson <[SGregson@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SGregson@cde.ca.gov)>

**Sent:** Thursday, November 7, 2019 5:13 PM

**To:** Serena Eisenberg <[eisenbergs@ajc.org](mailto:eisenbergs@ajc.org)>; Tony Thurmond <[TThurmond@cde.ca.gov](mailto:TThurmond@cde.ca.gov)>

**Cc:** Richard Hirschhaut <[hirschhautr@ajc.org](mailto:hirschhautr@ajc.org)>; Siamak Kordestani <[kordestanis@ajc.org](mailto:kordestanis@ajc.org)>; Eran Hazary <[hazarye@ajc.org](mailto:hazarye@ajc.org)>; Melanie Maron Pell <[pellm@ajc.org](mailto:pellm@ajc.org)>; Shanine Coats <[SCoats@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SCoats@cde.ca.gov)>; Cindy Quiralte

<CQuiralte@cde.ca.gov>

**Subject:** RE: Follow up questions - we eagerly await your response

Dear Serena,

Thank you for your email. We are happy to provide you with an update on the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

We selected the October 15, 2019 panel members based on their experience in Ethnic Studies either by being part of the historical movement, professors of Ethnic Studies, and those who have experience implementing Ethnic Studies in K–12 settings.

There are at least three ways that we are seeking feedback on success and challenges in implementing Ethnic Studies in K–12.

- (1) WestEd is conducting feedback sessions with teachers and administrators. This is an opportunity for us to hear from practitioners who have and have not implemented Ethnic Studies in the K–12 setting. It will provide us with an opportunity to hear the resources needed for the successful implementation of an Ethnic Studies course or program. These feedback sessions will take place this Fall and Winter.
- (2) We will visit districts in California this Winter to view their program in action and discuss their curriculum development experience, challenges and successes. Once we have a finalized list, we will share it on our IQC listserv.
- (3) Through public comment submitted during the development process of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

As you know, Assembly Bill 114 extended the timeline for the completion of the model curriculum to March 2021. The writers of the first draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum have completed their task. From this point, CDE staff will synthesize the learnings from the feedback sessions and listening visits, consultation with interested parties and experts, and feedback from the first 60-day public comment period and the ongoing revision process, into a revised draft which will contain recommendations to the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC). This draft will also be posted for public comment in 2020.

We are currently in the process of revising the timeline of significant events to reflect the updated statute. It is important to note that any interested parties may provide specific feedback to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum at any time by sending an email to [ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov](mailto:ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov).

We are encouraging all interested parties to join the IQC listserv to stay up to date on topics related to Ethnic Studies. Anyone can join the IQC listserv by sending a blank email to: [join-iqc@mlist.cde.ca.gov](mailto:join-iqc@mlist.cde.ca.gov).

Best,  
Stephanie Gregson

Stephanie Gregson, Ed.D.  
Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Instruction and Measurement Branch  
Executive Director, Instructional Quality Commission  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street, Suite 5206  
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**From:** Serena Eisenberg <[eisenbergs@ajc.org](mailto:eisenbergs@ajc.org)>  
**Sent:** Friday, November 1, 2019 2:49 PM  
**To:** Tony Thurmond <[TThurmond@cde.ca.gov](mailto:TThurmond@cde.ca.gov)>; Stephanie Gregson <[SGregson@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SGregson@cde.ca.gov)>  
**Cc:** Richard Hirschhaut <[hirschhautr@ajc.org](mailto:hirschhautr@ajc.org)>; Siamak Kordestani <[kordestanis@ajc.org](mailto:kordestanis@ajc.org)>; Eran Hazary <[hazarye@ajc.org](mailto:hazarye@ajc.org)>; Melanie Maron Pell <[pellm@ajc.org](mailto:pellm@ajc.org)>  
**Subject:** Follow up questions - we eagerly await your response

Dear Superintendent Thurmond and Deputy Superintendent Gregson:

We write as a follow up to our letter and email on October 10, 2019 (below) in which we asked some questions about the Ethnic Studies panel discussion forum on October 15, 2019 hosted by your office along with the California Department of Education. We eagerly await your response and, in the meantime, have some additional questions about the process for revising the ethnic studies model curriculum (ESMC).

Deputy Superintendent Gregson, we understood from your statement at the IQC meeting of September 20 and September 16 press release <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr19/yr19rel62.asp> that the process for revising and improving the curriculum would include a series of meetings with ethnic studies experts. It appears that the people your office invited to present at the October 15 forum, which only included persons who support the current ESMC draft (one was the co-chair of the committee which wrote it), are the "expert panel" referenced in your communications. As instructional materials, can't members of the public be permitted to apply to be experts who advise the CDE on the ethnic studies model curriculum?

There remain many other pressing questions, including those in our October 10 email and the following:

- What was the selection process to determine who constitutes the “expert panel” mentioned in your September 16, 2019 press release?
- When and where are these sessions referenced in that press release going to be held: “feedback sessions with ethnic studies teachers, ethnologists, experts, and interested parties,” and “listening sessions around the state to hear from the approximately 200 districts that have successfully implemented ethnic studies curriculums”?
- What is the selection process for the drafters of the revision? And who are the drafters, if already chosen?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- And what and when is the process for both internal state and then public review?

We hope that the process going forward will be transparent and inclusive, and conclude with a non-discriminatory curriculum that reflects and embraces the diversity of California’s students.

Thank you in advance for any information you can provide, which will enable us to respond effectively to our constituents across the state. **Of course, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person and will follow up to explore a mutually convenient time.**

Sincerely,



Serena Eisenberg  
AJC Northern California Director



Richard S. Hirschhaut  
AJC Los Angeles Director

CC: American Hellenic Council (AHC); Armenian Assembly of America (AAA); Armenian National Committee of America -- Western Region (ANCA-WR); Assyrian American Association of Southern California (AAASC); FACE (Faith and Community Empowerment); Hindu American Foundation (HAF); Korean American Coalition (KAC)

[PRIOR LETTER BELOW]

From: Serena Eisenberg

Sent: Friday, October 11, 2019 2:41 PM

To: 'TThurmond@cde.ca.gov' <[TThurmond@cde.ca.gov](mailto:TThurmond@cde.ca.gov)>; 'SGregson@cde.ca.gov' <[SGregson@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SGregson@cde.ca.gov)>

Cc: Richard Hirschhaut ([hirschhautr@ajc.org](mailto:hirschhautr@ajc.org)) <[hirschhautr@ajc.org](mailto:hirschhautr@ajc.org)>; Siamak Kordestani <[kordestanis@ajc.org](mailto:kordestanis@ajc.org)>; Eran Hazary <[hazarye@ajc.org](mailto:hazarye@ajc.org)>; Melanie Maron Pell <[pellm@ajc.org](mailto:pellm@ajc.org)>



*Subject: Questions regarding October 15th's Ethnic Studies Implementation panel discussion*

*October 10, 2019*

*Dear Superintendent Thurmond and Deputy Superintendent Gregson:*

*We write for two reasons:*

*First, to thank you for hosting October 15th's "Ethnic Studies Implementation" panel discussion. This is certain to be an informative session for educators and parents across the state who want to learn what Ethnic Studies is. There was not much advanced notice given for this meeting, however, so we hope CDE will post a video of the session on your YouTube channel as you do for other advisory panels. That way teachers teaching Tuesday morning and others not able to attend on short notice can access the content easily too. (The notice was sent to IQC list serv subscribers on October 10 with an October 14 RSVP deadline.)*

*Separately, we are also writing to inquire about the "panel discussion of experts...on what might go into the draft" Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum mentioned in the CDE's September 16 press release (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr19/yr19rel62.asp>):*

- Can you please provide us CDE's list of qualifications for serving on this expert panel?*
- Can you please send us CDE's application form for this panel and the application deadline?*
- Can you please send us the dates for the IQC and SBE public meetings that will be agendized for reviewing these applications and selecting the panelists, panelist training sessions, and when the panel's public discussions will be held?*

*We appreciate your response to these questions.*

*Thank you,*

*Serena Eisenberg  
AJC Northern California Director*

*Rick Hirschhaut  
AJC Los Angeles Director*

*CC: American Hellenic Council (AHC); Armenian Assembly of America (AAA); Armenian National Committee of America -- Western Region (ANCA-WR); Assyrian American Association of Southern California (AAASC); FACE (Faith and Community Empowerment); Hindu American Foundation (HAF); Korean American Coalition (KAC)*