



## Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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State Board of Education  
c/o California Department of Education  
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division  
1430 N Street, Suite 3207  
Sacramento, CA 95814

January 21, 2021

**VIA EMAIL to [ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov](mailto:ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov)**

re: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear State Board of Education,

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California (CHSSC) is a California non-profit organization dedicated to discovering and sharing the history of Chinese Americans. We believe in improving the state curriculum so that it accurately reflects the important role of Chinese Americans in the social, economic, and political development of this nation.

To that end, we appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Representatives of the CHSSC have participated in a few of the discussions organized by the Asian Pacific Islander School Board Members Association (APISBMA). We support APISBMA's request for revisions, which you will receive separately, to the final draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) to be presented to the State Board of Education (SBE) in March 2021.

The CHSSC does wish, however, to share additional observations and comments, and we urge further review, discussion, and revision prior to the adoption of the final ESMC. Some of our specific comments are:

1. We recognize that there are many justice and equity issues in society today, and that there needs to be more emphasis on the involvement by and contributions of all minority and ethnic peoples in the development of this country. We fully support more curriculum support for African American and Latina/o/x Studies.
2. We do note, however, that in Appendix A there is a lack of balance in the number of sample lesson offerings relative to the historical role and present population of Chinese Americans. We see a total of 21 sample lessons related to Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies. We must emphasize however that both Chinese and Filipino Americans are the largest API groups in California, and have had a presence in California for over two centuries. Each is represented by only one lesson plan, or less than 5% of the offerings. Those lesson plans are each only 7 pages in length, out of a total of over 300 pages for API's. In contrast, there are 8 Korean American lesson plans totaling 107 pages, or about 30% of the lesson plan content.

3. The above comments do not imply that we suggest reducing the number of Korean American lesson plans, but rather we should examine the overall picture and determine if we are overlooking important Chinese American themes. We note that Sample Lesson 17 discusses the role of Chinese railroad workers, which is important. However, that work is not the only part of Chinese American history that should be studied. California Assembly Bill 2864 (AB 2864), sponsored by Assemblymember Ed Chau and signed by Governor Brown in 2016, REQUIRES that students in California receive instruction regarding the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as well as the Chinese role in building the first transcontinental railroad. For background, see: <https://a49.asmdc.org/press-releases/20160926-governor-signs-legislation-highlight-chinese-american-history-curriculum>

Therefore, we strongly recommend development of a lesson on the Chinese Exclusion Acts, because the political and legal legacy has had a tremendous impact on all subsequent (API and other) immigration laws,

4. We have multiple comments on the accuracy and perspective of Lesson Plan 17 (Chinese Railroad Workers). There are a number of errors which should be corrected (the line numbers may be from an earlier version, but the context is explained, and a hand-marked copy is attached):

a. Line 1724: the rail line built jointly by the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads was only the First transcontinental railroad. Following its completion in 1869 there were multiple transcontinental railroad projects, and multiple regional railroad projects, that involved Chinese labor. The language should reflect that this was not just a one time involvement, but a long term engagement, of Chinese and many other ethnic groups.

b. Line 1726: The Chinese railroad worker labor strike of 1867 was a limited labor action, and actually had limited impact on the progress of the first transcontinental railroad. What it did help with was perhaps promote better wage and working conditions toward parity with other workers. The workers took action to fight exploitation, but we should not point to “racism” as the primary cause of the labor strike.

c. Line 1727: This sentence refers to just one image that was published widely, that of the “champagne” group gather of two locomotives meeting head to head. However, that was just a publicity photo taken AFTER the actual driving of the Golden Spike, which occurred after Chinese railroad workers had secured the final rails. Photos of the actual Golden Spike ceremony show Chinese railroad workers in plain view, but those photos were not as widely disseminated as the subsequent publicity photos. So it is a myth that Chinese workers were prevented from or not welcome at the completion. They just didn’t join in the publicity photos with all the suited up folks, because they did their job, laying the last rails, and went back to camp. It is inappropriate and misleading to assert that racism was the reason for Chinese being “excluded” from the photos. Unfortunately, the tone of the lesson plan seems to argue that that was the reason.

d. Lines 1727, 1776, 1841: The location of the joining of the rails was “Promontory, Utah” and not Promontory Point. Promontory Point is another location, miles away, in the Great Salt Lake, where a subsequent re-routing, 30 years later, of the Union Pacific across the shallow waters of the Lake included abutments at a peninsula called Promontory Point. This is a common mistake that is repeated in various “history” books and articles.

e. Lines 1728, 1789: To assert that the “champagne” photo did not include Chinese railroad workers due to the “white supremacy view of U.S. history” is both use of a politically loaded term and an inaccurate allegation. The term “white supremacy” is vague in that it implies that those not of color are “white”, and that “white” people oppress people of color. In reality, many peoples who settled this country, like those from Ireland, Poland, Sweden, Italy and many other places were harshly treated also, and often excluded from the “mainstream” society. Instead, we should avoid the simplistic profiling, just as we wish to avoid profiling of African Americans, Asian Americans, etc., of the root causes of racism and discrimination. Rather, we should be examining the larger forces, such as economics, political power, fear of “the other”, as the reasons why many conflicts and disparities are a part of our history. We ask for a much more nuanced perspective on race relations, than an overly simplistic “black and white” one.

f. Line 1743, 1747: “the Chinese Railroad Strike” doesn’t reflect that there were many other labor strikes by Chinese over the years.

g. Line 1758: Some of the other immigrant labor groups who worked on railroads or other major construction projects, such as roads, levees, canals and waterworks, and in many historic industries, from fishing, farming, canneries, mines, small business, personal services (laundry, barbering, health care) should be compared with present day contributions of immigrant laborers, business, industry, and education professionals, and political leaders.

h. Line 1801, 1843: “Denis” Kearney has only one “n”.

i. Line 1841: Asking students to write a letter to the Golden Spike commemoration committee explaining why the Chinese role should be recognized is somewhat behind the times. For years now, that role has been recognized as part of the official ceremony every May. Many books have been written about the subject. The Stanford University Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project has been studying and publishing on the topic for nearly ten years: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cqi-bin/website/>

We realize that the above commentary notes a number of errors and political inaccuracies that should be reviewed further. We would be happy to work with your agency in helping correct the lesson plans, but also to produce more lesson plans as feasible. In the meantime, Lesson 17 in Exhibit A needs to be fixed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(signed)  
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President

(signed)  
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