

From:

Sent: Wednesday, August 14, 2019 1:46 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: Bias and Misinformation in Proposed CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Instructional Quality Commission c/o California Department of Education
Curriculum Frameworks & Instructional Resources Division

RE: Bias and Misinformation in Proposed CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Instructional Quality Commission, California Department of Education,
and State Board of Education:

I am extremely concerned about troubling sections and omissions from the new proposed Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (the “curriculum”), currently under a mandated public review before submission to the state board of education.

I commend the State of California for enacting legislation mandating a model curriculum. It is laudable to educate about different ethnicities and cultures, and the curriculum contains valuable educational content about numerous marginalized communities in California.

However, I am deeply concerned by sections of the curriculum which omit antisemitism as a form of bigotry and openly promote hateful boycotts against the Jewish State of Israel. Despite its stated purpose, the proposed curriculum includes no lessons about Jews as a sizeable ethnic minority and as the American community most targeted by hate crimes based on religion.

The following examples of bias in the proposed curriculum illustrate the basis for our concern:

1. A glossary for the curriculum includes a definition of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against Israel. It claims the purpose of BDS is to “establish freedom for Palestinians living under apartheid conditions.” It then parrots more one-sided BDS talking points, offering no critical perspectives about this campaign of hate, including that its true purpose, as stated by its founders, is to end the existence of Israel, the only Jewish state.

2. The “Sample Course Models” for the curriculum:

- Encourage teachers to highlight BDS and a pro-BDS group called Direct Action for Palestine but not voices critical of their perspectives (p. 234).
- Promote a false equivalence between Israel's efforts to stop terrorists from entering communities to murder innocent people, and U.S. policies on the border with Mexico (p. 234).
- Use unclear language that implies "Israel-Palestine" as a whole is an Arab country (p. 237).
- Frame the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 War as fact, with no alternative perspectives (p. 242).
- Encourage teachers to use an anti-Israel poem which insinuates Jews control the media and use it to manipulate the public - a common, and quintessential, antisemitic slur (p. 256, 264-269).

3. The [Introduction](#) of the proposed curriculum states that "[t]he implementation of Ethnic Studies presents an opportunity for teachers to...enable students to develop a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusion, and aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism." Despite this stated goal, the curriculum does not feature a single lesson about the Jewish community, mentioning Jews only in passing. With antisemitism rising and ignorance about the Jewish people still a significant problem in our society, the exclusion of Jews from this curriculum is deeply disappointing and educationally deficient.

In short, these problematic sections and omissions are antithetical to the stated purpose of the curriculum, and we are greatly troubled by the harmful and lasting negative impact the current draft could have on children in California. Moreover, the biased sections and omissions violate portions of both the enacting legislation and the California Code of Education.

First, these biased sections and omissions run counter to the stated purpose of the curriculum, in particular:

- Section 1(a): The State of California is committed to providing excellent educational opportunities to all its pupils;
- Section 1(f): The state's educational standards should be guided by core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations; and

- Section 1(g): The state is committed to its efforts to provide all pupils with excellent educational opportunities, without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, income, sexual orientation, or disability.

Additionally, California Education Code § 233.5(a) provides:

"Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and *the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations*, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government." (Emphasis added).

The rise of antisemitism within our culture, which has been accompanied by an increasing general threat to freedom, human dignity and harmonious relations, is evidenced by the recent attacks of Jews in synagogues in Pittsburgh and Poway, as well as against other American citizens in El Paso and Dayton. The curriculum's failure to address antisemitism as a form of bigotry thus falls short of the above directive.

Furthermore, the California Education Code's [Prohibition of Discrimination](#) states, in relevant part, that "[n]o person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, **race or ethnicity**, **religion**... in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance, or enrolls pupils who receive state student financial aid."

Similarly, the California Education Code's Prohibition Instruction includes a provision on [Prejudice](#) that states, in relevant part, that "[a] teacher shall not give instruction and a school district shall not sponsor any activity that promotes a discriminatory bias on the basis of **race or ethnicity**, gender, **religion**, disability, nationality, or sexual orientation..." This provision, like the Prohibition of Discrimination mentioned above, illustrates the problems inherent in the proposed curriculum. Notably, while these provisions are sufficient to demonstrate the serious problems with the curriculum, they are not an exhaustive list of the provisions of the California Education Code with which the proposed curriculum appears to be in conflict, including provisions regarding factual accuracy of educational materials and the importance of utilizing educational resources devoid of political propaganda.

The model curriculum not only fails to address antisemitism as a form of bigotry but actually includes thinly veiled antisemitic rhetoric and promotes the discriminatory BDS movement. Additionally, the model curriculum simultaneously fails to provide balance regarding Israel or any education at all about Jews. As such, it effectively discriminates against Jewish and Israeli students in violation of the Education Code. Furthermore, by marginalizing Jewish and Israeli students, the model curriculum violates the three above-referenced declarations of the California state legislature in enacting the legislation.

Noting the critical [LA Times' review of the curriculum](#), I hope that the values of inclusion prevail over hatred, division, and misinformation. **In closing, I strongly urge you to review and revise the curriculum to remove bias and to educate students about American Jews as an ethnic group, including those who fled the Holocaust, oppression in the Middle East, and discrimination in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, we call on you to create safeguards that will prevent similar bias and omissions in this and other California state curriculums going forward.**

Sincerely,

Ayala Marks

Retired CA teacher