



# Jewish Voice for Peace

*Justice • Equality • Dignity*

*Jewish Voice for Peace, Los Angeles*

**January 21, 2021**

Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent, CA Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: Jewish Voice For Peace Los Angeles Chapter OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC**

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of **the Los Angeles chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, a national organization with 70 chapters, over 16,000 members, and over 250,000 supporters**, I am writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not live up to the values, principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.” We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

As an organization that prioritizes the needs of our community, Ethnic Studies is foundational to the education of our youth.

As a predominantly Jewish organization, and an anti-Zionist organization, Jewish Voice for Peace is dedicated to fighting against all forms of oppression and injustice, including anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and white supremacy. We are committed to the liberation and thriving of Palestinians, as well as Black, Indigenous, POC, Sephardi and Mizrahi members of our community, and all racialized and colonized peoples. A true, liberated ethnic studies is a crucial resource for all students to be able to think critically about the world around them and develop both the knowledge and the power to fight for a better world. This is not possible without a curriculum that is honest about power disparities, about the capitalist and colonial foundations of injustice, and about the connections between struggles for freedom in California and those around the world, especially in Palestine. Not only do these discriminatory revisions to the original model curriculum single out Palestinians and Arabs as not deserving of a culturally sustaining and critical pedagogy, but they deprive all students - Jewish and

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non-Jewish, Palestinian and non-Palestinian, POC and white, of the opportunity for an education that prepares them to be active, engaged, and confident community members struggling against forms of oppression that impact us all.

We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied.

We are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators:

- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the spirit of the original 1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes that led to Ethnic Studies as a discipline. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Jewish Voice for Peace, Los Angeles Leadership Team**

**Akhil Gopal, Estee Chandler, Sarah Jacobus, Craig Wilse, Dan Segal, Samir Salem**