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January 21, 2021

Dear Dr. Darling-Hammond, Members of the State Board of Education, and Superintendent Thurmond:

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) has worked for over a century to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and advance democratic values in the United States and around the world. We believe that the ESMC can be a crucial platform for educating students to embrace differences, build bridges, and fight bigotry – promoting human rights and uniting our country through shared democratic values.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide additional specific comments on this draft. We thank the California Department of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission for recommendations that have led to improvements now reflected in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) Third Field Review. However, we request that you retain and even strengthen several of the changes that have been made, particularly the following:

- We encourage you to retain the inclusive approach to ethnic studies, represented by the addition of new lessons that better reflect California's rich ethnic diversity -- Sikhs, Hindus, Koreans, Armenians, and the diversity of Jewish Americans.
- We encourage you to retain the additional language that will help ensure a more balanced approach to Ethnic Studies and add additional guidance for teachers to safeguard against narrow political indoctrination in the classroom. (As noted in the review below, we further urge that the additional balance language be added to the Guiding Values throughout the curriculum, and that all sample lessons be aligned with the Eight Outcomes.)
- We appreciate the inclusion of lesson materials on antisemitism in Ethnic Studies, particularly the inclusion of Lesson 40 and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition is the most widely endorsed definition, used by numerous governments here and abroad, diverse religious groups including major Jewish organizations and the Global Council of Imams, and educational institutions worldwide. (As noted in the review below, we further urge that lesson 40 on "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans" be added to the Asian American Studies Section to ensure that the ESMC complies with State Board of Education requirements and does not promote bias or discrimination; and that the link to the IHRA definition be restored.)

The enclosed review offers specific suggestions to help ensure an inclusive and balanced curriculum and to address concerns about particular material. We also would appreciate your ongoing efforts to remove problematic content that fosters demonization and discrimination and promotes violent resistance.



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Thank you for considering these suggestions to strengthen and improve the ESMC so that the curriculum will better address issues of racial injustice and strengthen our democracy. K-12 students across California deserve an opportunity to honestly confront racism in all its forms, build bridges of interethnic understanding, and see themselves in the curriculum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Serena Eisenberg".

Rabbi Serena Eisenberg, Northern California AJC Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Hirschhaut".

Richard Hirschhaut, Los Angeles AJC Director



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AJC Third Field Review Specific Line by Line Requests:

Preface

Page 7, lines 127-130: replace these lines with the following to ensure historical accuracy (changes are underscored):

“Include information on the ethnic studies movement, specifically the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), including its significance in the establishment of ethnic studies as a discipline and its work in promoting the positive values of diversity and inclusion within higher education, alongside some negative currents such as antisemitism and celebrating militant Communist revolutionaries.”

Chapter 1

Page 11, line 229, begin the paragraph with this guidance from the Los Angeles “Elements of a Balanced Curriculum,” with a footnote reference: “At the college and university level, Ethnic Studies and related courses are sometimes taught from a specific political point of view. In K-12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically and form their own opinions.” Source: “2017 the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Multidisciplinary Ethnic Studies Advisory Team, “Elements of a Balanced Curriculum,” <https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/226/Balance%202017.pdf>

Page 12, line 244: remove “and Principles”

Chapter 2

Page 5, footnote 1: change to this working link: Footnote 1 “2017 the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Multidisciplinary Ethnic Studies Advisory Team, “Elements of a Balanced Curriculum,” <https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/226/Balance%202017.pdf>

Chapter 3

Page 17, line 395-396: remove: “critical race theory”

Critical race theory pedagogy is problematic when applied in K-12 classrooms. For example, this draft curriculum suggests that teachers sort students by race and give students different race-based assignments (e.g. Sammy Lee lesson). Critical race theory, which promotes race-based labeling, would have teachers stereotype students based on their race which is not consistent with the rules governing



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the State Board of Education and California’s teachers. These practices have the real potential of causing harmful, oppositional dynamics at school such as bullying and discrimination.

Page 19, line 455: change “Arab Americans” to “Middle Eastern Americans”

Page 23, line 545: change “Arab Americans” to “Middle Eastern Americans”

Page 30, line 747: change “Arab Americans” to “Middle Eastern Americans”

Appendix A

Page 6, lines 138-139: change to “As a reminder, the values are:” (Remove “and principles”)

Page 7, line 158: add the following as a new paragraph at the end of the 6th guiding value (and add elsewhere each other place the guiding values appear in the curriculum):

“7. In K–12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically, and form their own opinions. Curriculum, resources, and materials should include a balance of topics, authors, and concepts, including primary and secondary sources that represent multiple, and sometimes opposing, points of view or perspectives. Students will actively seek to understand, analyze, and articulate multiple points of view, perspectives and cultures. The instruction, material, or discussion must be appropriate to the age and maturity level of the students, and be a fair, balanced, and humanizing academic presentation of various points of view consistent with accepted standards of professional responsibility, rather than advocacy, personal opinion, bias or partisanship.”
[Adapted from the LA Balanced Curriculum Guidelines at
<https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/226/Balance%202017.pdf>.]

Page 7, Add immediately after line 169: All sample lessons should include alignments to Chapter 1’s “Eight Outcomes of K-12 Ethnic Studies Teaching,” consistent with best pedagogical practices that aligned with specific learning outcomes.

Page 16, Line 380: Add immediately after “Liberation movements.” “In addition to being celebrated for making higher education more inclusive of marginalized communities, TWLF has also been criticized for various reasons for promoting destructive influences such as antisemitism and celebrating militant Communist revolutionaries.”

Page 40, line 901: add the following in the same sentence immediately after “historical figure” -
“historical figure of the student’s choosing, from this list or elsewhere, to research. Figures who foster



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demonization of other ethnic groups or promote violent resistance are not appropriate role models for combating racism and bigotry."

Pages 43-51, lines 977-1137, and pages 314-315, lines 6546-6575:

In general, we urge you to remove historical figures who foster demonization and discrimination against other ethnic groups, and those who promote violent resistance. Among those we encourage you to consider removing are Assata Shakur, Lolita Lebrón, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Eddy Zheng, Linda Sarsour, and Helen Thomas.

Page 53, line 1169: change the following immediately from: "Students will learn about redlining, racial covenants, and better understand why African Americans, as well as other people of color, have historically settled in certain neighborhoods, whether voluntarily or involuntarily."

To the following: "Students will also learn about redlining, racial covenants, and better understand why African Americans, as well as other racial and religious minorities, have faced housing discrimination and have historically settled in certain neighborhoods, whether voluntarily or involuntarily."

See for example: https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm

Page 96, add a new line immediately before line 2160: "'Color Lines:' Changing and Broadening Perspectives on Racism."

This topic addresses how individual and societal theories about race change over time. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois, widely known for his 'color line' theory -- that a race's problems are attributed only to skin color prejudice -- reconsidered and broadened his understanding of "color line" divisions by 1949 after visiting post-Holocaust Poland:

"I have seen something of human upheaval in this world; the scream and shot of race riots in Atlanta, the marching of the Ku Klux Klan, the threat of courts and police; the neglect and destruction of human habitation, but nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949. I would have said before seeing it that it was impossible...to treat fellow human beings as Warsaw had been treated...complete, planned, and utter destruction...the total of the dead...

"The result...was a more and complete understanding of the Negro problem. In the first place, the problem of slavery, emancipation and caste in the United States in my mind was no longer a separate and unique thing as I had so long conceived it. It was not even a matter solely of color and physical and racial characteristics, which was particularly a hard thing for me to learn, since for a lifetime the color line had been a real and efficient cause of misery...



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"The race problem in which I was interested cut across lines of color and physique and belief and status and was a matter of cultural patterns, perverted teaching and human hate and prejudice, which reached all sorts of people and caused endless evil to all men. So that the ghetto of Warsaw helped me to emerge from a certain social provincialism into a broader conception of what the fight against race segregation, religious discrimination and the oppression by wealth had to become if civilization was going to triumph and broaden into the world...

"It cannot be too often told: of Poland's thirty-two million inhabitants, six and a half million died...All this should lead both these groups [Negros and Jews] and others to reassess and reformulate the problems of our day, whose solution belongs to no group...This is a present problem of all Americans and becomes the pressing problem of the civilized world." -- "Du Bois on Religion" edited by Phil Zuckerman, *"The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto" speech given in New York City, 1952 (pages 197-199).*

Pages 485-493, lines 10214-10382: Move Lesson #40 "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle-Eastern Americans" to the "Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies" section immediately after Lesson 35. This will pair the lesson on South Asian Americans and antisemitism with the lessons on South Asian Americans and Islamophobia and xenophobia, consistent with the "thematic approach to ethnic studies," and reinforce the ESMC's emphasis on the "importance of identifying shared struggles." (ESMC Preface and Chapter 3). It will also bring the ESMC into closer compliance with the State's requirements to treat peoples with proportionality and balance, and avoid bias and discrimination, as California and Federal laws and the State Board of Education's Social Content Standards and ESMC Guidelines require.

Page 491, line 10375: Add this link immediately after "facilities":
<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>. The California State Board of Education's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Guidelines require that the ESMC "include access to ...primary source documents." This link will allow teachers to access the primary source. *As an additional resource about the Jewish community's lived experience of discrimination and antisemitism, see AJC: The State of Antisemitism in America 2020.*

Appendix B

Pages 4- 13, lines 70-278. We request that the State Board of Education review with its legal counsel the «Affirmations, Chants, and Energizers » which have students, among other things, reciting the names of Aztec and Mayan gods. (For example, Tezkatlipoka, Tezkatlipoka (line 188); Quetzalkoatl, Quetzalcoatl (line 195); Hunab Ku (line 232); Huitzilopochtli, huitzilopochtli (line 207); and Xipe Totek (line 219), who was an Aztec god celebrated at a festival of human sacrifices.)



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The CDE should determine whether these violate (i) the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which does not allow governments to encourage or promote religion, and (ii) California law including, but not limited to, Education Code Sections 51500, 51501 and 60044 and the California Constitution (Article I, Section 4; Article IX, Section 8 and Article XVI, Section 5). If they do, remove this content and all references to it in the curriculum and instructional materials and resources allowed for use in California classrooms.