

February 3, 2020

Dear Members of the Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division,

Allow me to begin by offering my sincere and deep appreciation for your commitment to make a difference. AB 2016 attempts to create a more inclusive and diverse look at the political, social, and economic contributions of various groups. Thirty years ago, as a Social Studies Educator, I entered the classroom to do exactly the same thing. I've been fortunate. Much of my success is attributed to my ability to transform victimization to validation, trauma to trust, and pain to power- all while teaching social studies.

When children see themselves in the content they are able to envision a future. On the other hand, children who are not taught about the contributions of others fall victim to stereotypes. On January 11, 2017, Dylann Roof was sentenced to death. He killed 8 African Americans in a church. He is the youngest person to receive the death penalty for a hate crime. Why aren't we incensed that he did this at such a young age? Did you ever think about his childhood? What did he learn? What didn't he learn?

I submit the introduction in order to offer a very important perspective of the state's efforts to create an "elective" in Ethnic Studies. Been there- done that. Remember the 60's...Chicano Studies, African-American studies? As an African-American Studies major from Howard University and Fellow from Columbia University, I know what the real issues are in our classrooms. I hope you and others will reconsider this "elective" initiative and realize that the true error occurs with the omission of multicultural contributions in all disciplines. "Electives" only perpetuate the SEGREGATION of content and people. Moreover, I contend that INTEGRATION did not heal wounds or unite individuals within school settings because we never integrated content. In essence, minorities were placed in white classroom only to remain omitted from the content- which validated concepts of superiority and inferiority. All children need to learn about the contributions of all those who helped build this country and their contributions should be addressed across all content areas, not simply the students who "elect" to learn. In addition, electives are a high school dynamic- and perspectives about race and inclusion are often formed much earlier. Dylann Roof had already spent his K-8 years under a confederate flag that flew over his school building until the state senate removed it- after 8 African-Americans were killed in that church.

The mere segregation of the content, much like the NAACP awards vs. the Oscars suggests that there are two Americas. This is where schools and the nation keep failing. We

isolate who we acknowledge. What message are you sending when this powerful content about the contributions of minorities to this nation are SEGREGATED or an elective? Will the student who would benefit the most even be able to take the course, or by high school will they even be interested in learning this content if they've spent years being invisible? As a juvenile court school teacher, many of my students are there because of self-esteem issues that manifest with criminality. Most enter the room stating that they "hate history" or often feel disenfranchised and angry at a nation that has labeled and excluded their ancestors. They are transformed when they see personal connections to the content. When I reference those stories of how adversity created opportunity (Valentia-Mexican-Americans in WWII, Tuskegee Airmen, and Port Chicago 50), they are inspired to learn the system and to succeed by taking advantage of those political, social, and economic freedoms. Non-minorities gain a new level of respect for other groups, and there is a true sense of equity in my classroom.

The initiative should really demand that the well-written standards, which already require diversity and inclusion, be thoroughly implemented and that teacher performance be tied to this expectation. Moreover, perhaps we should rethink our **teacher education coursework mandates**- given the true power and influence that the classroom has in designing our future. I did not create any "new" stories when I entered my old high school in 1990, as an Educator. I looked at the standards and simply made sure I told the whole story. Thank you.

Florence Avognon,

California Teacher of the Year 2012

Cc: State Board of Education (SBE)  
Instructional Quality Commission  
Luis Alejo, The Honorable Assemblymember