

83 Organizations Urge Safeguards Against Political Indoctrination in ESMC

SENT VIA EMAIL

August 7, 2019

Ms. Soomin Chao
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Chairperson Chao,

Our 83 civil rights, human rights, religious and education organizations are deeply troubled by the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) and truly alarmed that if [AB 331](#) is approved by the California state legislature in the coming days, every high school student in the state will be required to take an ethnic studies course based on the ESMC before graduating. We are aware that many individuals and groups affiliated with the Jewish community have already written to you about the ESMC's shocking omission of information about American Jews and anti-Semitism, its use of classic anti-Semitic stereotypes, and its blatant anti-Israel bias. This includes the California Legislative Jewish Caucus, who [wrote](#) to you that they "cannot support a curriculum that erases the American Jewish experience, fails to discuss anti-Semitism, reinforces negative stereotypes about Jews, singles out Israel for criticism and would institutionalize the teaching of anti-Semitic stereotypes in our public schools."

Our organizations share all of the serious concerns raised by the Jewish Caucus. **We are writing to you, however, because we believe these concerns highlight a much deeper and graver problem**, namely, the fact that an educational curriculum can be hijacked by those pushing a political and hateful agenda. If not addressed, this problem threatens to undermine not only the current effort to develop an ethnic studies model curriculum, but all other curricular efforts undertaken by the Department of Education. In order to prevent such abuse and the extremely harmful consequences that will ensue from it, **we believe safeguards *must* be put in place before *any* state-mandated curriculum is adopted for use in California classrooms.**

The anti-Jewish, anti-Israel bias of the proposed ESMC curriculum — including its implicit portrayal of Jews and Israel as part of "interlocking systems of oppression and privilege" and its endorsement of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement as a form of "direct action" or "resistance" that students are encouraged to engage in — clearly exposes the **politically motivated and directed nature** of the curriculum and its drafters. Not surprisingly, more than one-quarter of the [Model Curriculum Advisory Committee](#) members, appointed by the State Board of Education to draft the ESMC, have publicly expressed animus towards Israel and its supporters, with some members openly supporting BDS. There is no doubt that these committee members have unconscionably used the state-

mandated curriculum as a tool for politically indoctrinating California's high school students with anti-Israel propaganda and encouraging them to engage in political activism against the Jewish state.

As an educator and school administrator, you are surely aware of the dangers of allowing political indoctrination to substitute for rigorous scholarship and quality pedagogy. In the case of the ESMC, such political indoctrination impedes the flow of objective information about a complex topic of global importance and deprives students of critical knowledge for adequately understanding their community, their state, their country, and the world. This is certainly not what state legislators had in mind when they approved [AB 2016](#) mandating the development of "a model curriculum in ethnic studies" for use in California high schools, with the primary objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures." Indeed, the political indoctrination at the heart of the ESMC does the exact opposite.

Moreover, there is considerable evidence showing that the kind of anti-Zionist propaganda and activism promoted in the ESMC is strongly linked to acts of anti-Jewish hostility. Studies of anti-Semitic activity on college and university campuses across the country have consistently shown that schools with anti-Zionist expression and activity, including the promotion of BDS, are about three times more likely to host incidents targeting Jewish students for harm, including acts of harassment, vandalism and assault. Implementation of a model curriculum that includes the promulgation of such political, ethnic or religious hatred can't help but threaten the safety and well-being of Jewish and pro-Israel high school students in the state. And California college and university campuses, already reeling from the alarming number of anti-Zionist-motivated acts of aggression perpetrated against their Jewish and pro-Israel students, will undoubtedly see dramatic increases in these anti-Semitic acts with the influx of the state's high school graduates.

We agree that the ESMC must be drastically revised or completely re-written. However, unless and until safeguards are put in place for ensuring that its drafters will not be permitted to use the model curriculum to promote political, ethnic or religious enmity towards *any* group, or to weaponize high school students to take action based on such enmity, we fear that whatever model curriculum is adopted by the IQC will have an enormously negative impact on the state's high schools, colleges and universities for years to come. We strongly urge you, as well as the Board of Education officials and state legislators copied on this e-mail, to immediately address this consequential problem **by establishing safeguards for ensuring that all state-sponsored curricula and other instructional materials may *never* be created or used as tools of political indoctrination that promote hatred and incite harm against any race, religion, group or individual.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Academic Council for Israel
Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)
Alums for Campus Fairness - National
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Davis
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA
AMCHA Initiative

American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Institute for Jewish Research
American Jewish International Relations Institute
American Truth Project
American Values
Americans Fighting Antisemitism
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
B'nai B'rith International
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources
Bobcats for Israel at Ohio University
Boston Israel Action Committee
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Bulldogs for Israel (Brooklyn College)
California Association of Scholars
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore
Christians and Jews United for Israel
Club Z
Coalition for Jewish Values
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)
Conference of Jewish Affairs
Congregation Beth El Israel Committee
Dartmouth Students for Israel
Davis Faculty for Israel
Eagles Wings
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)
Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors
Hasbara Fellowships
Herut North America, U.S. Division
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization
Israel in NYC
Israel Matters
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)
Israeli-American Civic Action Network
Israeli-American Civic Education Institute
JAM
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
Legal Insurrection Foundation
Librarians for Fairness
Middle East Forum
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel
National Council of Young Israel
NCSY

NH4Israel
North Carolina Coalition for Israel
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rabbinical Alliance of America
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
Russian Jewish Community Foundation
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America
Simon Wiesenthal Center
Stop Anti-Semitism Now
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
Students Supporting Israel at Chapman University
Students Supporting Israel at Columbia
Students Supporting Israel at Drake University
Students Supporting Israel at San Jose State University
Students Supporting Israel at UCLA
Students Supporting Israel National
Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus
The Israel Christian Nexus
The Israel Group
The Lawfare Project
Tufts Friends of Israel
WoMen Fight Antisemitism
World Jewish Congress North America
Young Jewish Conservatives
Zionist Organization of America
ZOA's Fuel for Truth

Cc: The Honorable Tony Thurmond, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Jamie Callahan, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director of the California State Board of Education
Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, President of the California State Board of Education
Dr. Stephanie Gregson, Director, Instructional Quality Commission, and Deputy Superintendent
of Public Instruction, Performance, Planning & Technology Branch
Sarah Neville-Morgan, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, Teaching & Learning
Support Branch
California Senator Ben Allen, Member, Instructional Quality Commission, and Chair, California
Legislative Jewish Caucus
California Assemblymember Shirley Weber, Member, Instructional Quality Commission and
Chair of the State Assembly Select Committee on Campus Climate
California Senator Connie M. Leyva, Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Education
California Assemblymember Jose Medina, Chair, State Assembly Committee on Higher Education
California Legislative Jewish Caucus