

152 Scholars and Academics: Vote NO on AB 101

Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell
Assembly Education Committee Chair
1303 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

SENT VIA EMAIL

March 22, 2021

RE: 152 Scholars and Academics Urge You to Vote NO on AB 101

Honorable Assembly Education Committee Chair Patrick O'Donnell,

We are 152 university scholars and academics, many with decades of experience designing and carrying out empirical research and qualified to analyze scholarly publications, who are writing to express our strong opposition to AB 101. Considered against the backdrop of the catastrophic educational losses and trauma that many California students have experienced as a result of the pandemic, it is irresponsible and unethical to pass a bill requiring students to take a course based on a curriculum that has not been shown to improve students' academic achievement and may in fact add to their trauma.

Most of us were signatories on letters to the California Department of Education exposing the unsubstantiated and misleading claims that provide the rationale for why school districts should implement the curriculum.

Our [first letter](#), sent on January 21, 2021, contained an eight-page analysis of the research cited in the Benefits of Ethnic Studies section of the Introduction to the Third Field Review of the ESMC. Focusing on the overarching claim of the section taken verbatim from a 2011 review article by Christine Sleeter — “There is considerable research evidence that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students” — as well as several other specific claims about the educational benefits of ethnic studies attributed to various research articles, the comprehensive analysis found that ***none of the articles cited in the ESMC provided sufficient evidence for the claims attributed to it.***

Furthermore, we pointed out that our conclusions were corroborated by none other than Thomas Dee and Emily Penner, authors of the most recent study cited in the curriculum, in which they wrote that previous ethnic studies (ES) research “relies on research designs that cannot necessarily support credible causal inference” and concluded that “the theoretical arguments and public enthusiasm for ES curricula have not been matched by convincing quantity evidence on their efficacy.” The researchers even cautioned against attempts at “scaling up and replicating” the ethnic studies course they themselves had investigated, noting that “the effects of such smaller-scale interventions are often very different when the same policies are implemented at scale.” Nevertheless, the ESMC ignored Dee and

Penner's plea for caution, exaggerating the researchers' very modest and somewhat confounding results - that students hovering slightly below a 2.0 GPA who were encouraged to take an ethnic studies course improved their GPAs compared to students slightly above a 2.0 GPA who were *not* encouraged to take the course (while students who were encouraged to take the course but did not do so similarly improved their academic scores, and students who took the course but were not encouraged to do so did not gain academically) - to support the ESMC's sweeping claim that ethnic studies courses increase student GPAs, especially in math and science.

Our [second letter](#), sent on March 4, was a response to a petition addressed to Superintendent Thurmond that was organized by Christine Sleeter, author of the ESMC's central claim that ethnic studies courses result in "positive academic and social outcomes for students." The petition itself acknowledges the lack of robust empirical research on the academic benefits of ethnic studies, but astonishingly argues that these empirically unsubstantiated claims should continue to serve as justification for not only teaching "critical" ethnic studies courses, but for requiring students to take such courses. In our letter we noted that besides providing a major rationale for the ESMC itself, **Sleeter's unsubstantiated 2011 claim has served as the rationale for the promotion of almost every piece of public policy regarding the teaching of ethnic studies in California schools, including AB 2016, AB 1460 and AB 331.**

We also stressed the bad faith of the activist-educators who knowingly promulgate false claims about the academic benefits of ethnic studies in order to ensure that the highly politicized and controversial version of the discipline known as Critical Ethnic Studies — a version that many Californians believe is extremely divisive, will promote hatred and bigotry in CA classrooms, and is wholly inappropriate for K-12 students — will be taught in California classrooms.

Unfortunately, last week the State Board of Education unanimously approved an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that retained every one of the wholly unsubstantiated claims about the educational benefits of ethnic studies courses. In addition, several SBE members and a CDE official alarmingly confirmed that the final curriculum is firmly rooted in Critical Ethnic Studies.

As you well know, the pandemic has been responsible for a catastrophic loss of instruction for millions of K-12 students in the state. One [study](#) by researchers at Stanford University found that during the early stages of the pandemic, children lost an average of 116 days of reading time and 215 days of math work, and that recovery from these losses could take years. **In light of the pandemic's drastic reversal of students' academic achievement, it is irresponsible and unethical to pass a bill requiring students to take a course based on a curriculum that has not been shown to improve students' academic achievement and may in fact add to their trauma.**

We therefore urge you to vote no on AB 101.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned 152 University Scholars and Academics:

Alexander Figotin, PhD, Professor, UC Irvine
 Alvin Rosenfeld, PhD, Professor, Indiana University
 Alvin Sokolow, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC Davis
 Amy Elman, PhD, Professor, Kalamazoo College
 Andrew Pessin, PhD, Professor, Connecticut College
 Andrew Viterbi, Professor Emeritus, UC San Diego
 Anna Krylov, PhD, Professor, University of Southern California
 Anne Pym McDonald, PhD, Professor Emerita, CSU East Bay
 Anton Gorodetski, PhD, Professor, UC Irvine
 Anton Kapustin, PhD, Professor, California Institute of Technology
 Arie Warshel, PhD, Nobel Laureate and Distinguished Professor, University of Southern California
 Arnold Felsenfeld, MD, Professor Emeritus, UCLA
 Arnold Jacobson, MD, Professor Emeritus, UC San Francisco
 B. Nelson Ong, PhD, Professor Emeritus, College of New Rochelle
 Bard Cosman, MD, MPH, Professor, UC San Diego School of Medicine
 Barry Chiswick, PhD, Professor, George Washington University
 Barry Demchak, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC San Diego
 Barry Simon, PhD, Professor Emeritus, California Institute of Technology
 Barry Weissman, OD, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UCLA School of Medicine
 Boris Mityagin, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University
 Carmel Chiswick, PhD, Professor Emerita, University of Illinois at Chicago
 Carol Edelman, PhD, Professor Emeritus, CSU Chico
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 Daniel Klein, PhD, Professor, George Mason University
 Daniel Neuhauser, PhD, Professor, UCLA
 Daniel Palanker, PhD, Professor, Stanford University
 Darrell Long, PhD, Distinguished Professor, UC Santa Cruz
 David Bensimon, PhD, Professor, UCLA
 David Feifel, MD, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC San Diego
 David Klieger, PhD, Distinguished Professor and Executive Vice Chancellor Emeritus, UC Santa Cruz
 David Potts, PhD, Professor, City College of San Francisco
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 Deanne Meyer, PhD, Cooperative Extension Specialist, UC Davis
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 Dennis Carson, MD, Professor Emeritus, UC San Diego
 Doreen De Leon, PhD, Professor, CSU Fresno
 Edward H. Rabin, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC Davis
 Eli Yablonovitch, PhD, Professor, UC Berkeley
 Ezra Maguen, MD, FACS, FICS, Clinical Professor, UCLA
 Fred Cohen, DMA, Professor and Director, School of Music and Dance, San Jose State University
 Frederick Milstein, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC Santa Barbara
 Gabe Vorobiof, MD, Professor, UCLA School of Medicine
 George M. Lewis, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Cal Poly, SLO

George Roussas, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UC Davis
George Seaver, PhD, Independent Researcher
Gerald Gillespie, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University
Gina Strumwasser, PhD, Professor Emerita, Fresno State University
Helene Levens Lipton, PhD, Professor Emerita, UC San Francisco
Ilan Benjamin, PhD, Distinguished Professor, UC Santa Cruz
Irving Biederman, PhD, Professor, University of Southern California
Itzhak Bars, PhD, Professor, University of Southern California
Ivan Schuller, PhD, Distinguished Professor, UC San Diego
Jack Berger, MD, PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Southern California
James Enstrom, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UCLA
James Fay, PhD, Professor Emeritus, CSU East Bay
Jay Bergman, PhD, Professor, Central Connecticut State University
Jay Rosenheim, PhD, Distinguished Professor, UC Davis
Jeffrey Carmel, MD, Adjunct Professor Emeritus, Stanford University School of Medicine
Jeffrey Ullman, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University
Jessica Emami, PhD, Adjunct Professor, Marymount University
Jim Moore, PhD, Professor, University of Southern California
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John M. Ellis, PhD, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, UC Santa Cruz
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Joseph Manson, PhD, Professor, UCLA
Joshua Muravchik, PhD, Adjunct Professor, Institute of World Politics
Judea Pearl, PhD, Chancellor's Professor, UCLA
Judith Frydman, PhD, Stanford University
Kaare Strom, PhD, Distinguished Professor, UC San Diego
Keith Whitaker, PhD, Chairman, National Association of Scholars
Larry Alexander, LLB, Distinguished Professor, University of San Diego
Larry Clayton, PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Alabama
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Leila Beckwith, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UCLA
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Mark Barash, PhD, Professor, San Jose State University
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Mitchell Langbert, PhD, Professor, Brooklyn College
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