

February 27, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
State of California
1303 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
President, State Board of
Education
1430 N. Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, and Dr. Darling-Hammond,

We write on behalf of a large and diverse constituency across California to oppose the narrowing of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) announced by the Department of Education on [January 24, 2020](#). From the announcement, it appears that the ESMC will exclude many California ethnic minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Hellenes, Hindus, Koreans, and Mizrahi, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi Jews, among others. Such exclusion is inconsistent with AB 2016, the assurances made after the release of the unacceptable first draft of the ESMC, and is contrary to California and federal law. For these reasons, and as expressed more fully below, we urge the State of California to adopt a fully inclusive, multi-cultural curriculum that recognizes the ethnic and cultural history and contributions of all Californians.

Over 18,000 official comments were submitted criticizing the 2019 draft of the ESMC, which was replete with highly politicized material and cultural misrepresentations. As Governor Newsom noted at the time, the 2019 draft was offensive to some communities and needed to be significantly revised.¹ We appreciate that the Department of Education has now signaled that the discriminatory material will be removed. But, to the say the least, it would be insufficient simply to remove the obviously biased aspects of the initial draft. It would be worse to exclude other ethnicities from the curriculum, as the January 24th announcement indicated, and only provide vague direction to teachers to have “conversations” about the diverse cultural backgrounds of California students.² We urge that

¹Governor Newsom: "It's going to be taken care of...We are united in our resolve to make sure the advisory committee draft ...will be substantially amended. And let me also apologize on behalf of the state for the anxiety that this produced. It was offensive in so many ways..." <https://www.jweekly.com/2019/08/23/in-face-to-face-with-gov-newsom-strong-support-for-jewish-concerns/>

State Board of Education leaders: "We must arrive at a curriculum that ...fully aligns with California's values of inclusivity, empathy, accuracy, and honesty." <https://edsource.org/2019/california-needs-time-to>
"A model curriculum should be accurate, free of bias, appropriate for all learners in our diverse state and align with Governor Newsom's vision of a *California For All*." <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/nr/yr19sberel01.asp>

² State Superintendent Thurmond stated, "...while we are recommending to the IQC [Instructional Quality Commission] and the State Board that it [the ESMC] be grounded in those four groups, there will be opportunities

these diverse narratives be made a central part of the curriculum, subject to the same public vetting as all other California instructional materials and not treated as supplemental or optional material.

To be clear, we support the ESMC effort to fully address the historic and present-day experience of African American, Asian American, Chicano and Latino and Native Americans. This is especially so given the past and ongoing experience of these groups with systemic racism and marginalization, including in mainstream high school curricula. But, fully addressing these issues should not come at the expense of, and by marginalizing, other ethnic groups. As AB 2016 so clearly states, the broader term “ethnicity” (not just race or skin color) should be the criteria used when deciding which groups to feature in the ESMC. A curriculum based on a narrowly focused and politicized approach consciously and erroneously divides Californians into “people of color,” on the one hand, and all other supposedly ethnic and non-ethnic whites, on the other. California legislators envisioned a multi-cultural approach to ethnic studies in which the focus is for students to gain a deeper understanding of American society and its diverse ethnic composition and to develop respect for cultural diversity in our pluralistic society.

Based on a review of the legislative record with the support of counsel, we believe that inclusivity was a vital principle of the legislature’s intention when they passed AB 2016. This was not reflected in the more narrowly focused curriculum, which the CDE released in 2019 and appears ready to bring again with limited and inadequate revisions. As you know, AB 2016 calls for the state’s educational standards to be “guided by core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations” and notes the objective of preparing pupils “with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures.”³

Governor Newsom has outlined a vision of a “California for All” in which inclusiveness is a paramount principle. In that spirit, we are committed to working with you to incorporate the full spectrum of experiences of ethnic communities to ensure that California students receive a comprehensive education about the full ethnic diversity of the State.

to have conversations about the experience and struggle of other groups.”

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/wr/rf/edt/edtalks-ep8.asp>

³ AB-2016 Pupil instruction: ethnic studies. Signed into law September 13, 2016.

https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2016

Sincerely,



Rabbi Serena Eisenberg
Northern California Director
American Jewish Committee



Dr. James F. Dimitriou
President
American Hellenic Council



Richard S. Hirschhaut
Los Angeles Director
American Jewish Committee



Hyepin Im
President and CEO
Faith and Community Empowerment



Nora Hovsepian, Esq.
Chair
Armenian National Committee of America
-Western Region



Samir Kalra, Esq.
Managing Director
Hindu American Foundation



Mihran Toumajan
Western Region Director
Armenian Assembly of America



Eunice Hur Song, Esq.
Executive Director
Korean American Coalition



Peter Warda
President
Assyrian American Association of
Southern California



Sarah Levin
Executive Director
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and
North Africa (JIMENA)