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January 20, 2021

By electronic delivery only

State Board of Education
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901
ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov

RE: Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum – Third Revision

Dear Members of the State Board of Education:

The Anti-Defamation League's five California offices submit this comment on the third draft of the revised Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) released in November 2020. **ADL endorses the teaching of Ethnic Studies** and was an early supporter of last year's Assembly Bill 331 (Medina) which would have made it a mandatory course for high school students. Adding Ethnic Studies to California's high school curriculum will, among other things, foster respect between students and an appreciation for our nation's diverse history.

Founded in 1913 in response to an escalating climate of antisemitism and bigotry, ADL has since become a leading anti-hate organization. As we seek to create a more just and inclusive society, our ultimate goal is a world in which no group or individual suffers from bias, discrimination, or hate.

ADL appreciates the Instructional Quality Commission's (IQC) approval of many of the California Department of Education's (CDE) recommendations on the ESMC draft. In particular, we acknowledge with gratitude that this revision continues to **exclude the overt antisemitism and extreme and gratuitous anti-Israel bias** that plagued the first ESMC draft. **Content denigrating and marginalizing any person or group has no place in the curriculum**, and we urge you to continue to resist any efforts to reinsert such divisive material.

In addition, we are **grateful that the draft recognizes antisemitism** as a form of historical and continuing bigotry, and that it contains two lesson plans in Appendix A covering the Jewish experience and antisemitism – Lesson 40: *Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans* and Lesson 41: *Jewish Americans: Identity, Intersectionality, and Complicating Ideas of Race*. Both lesson plans provide definitions of antisemitism,¹ and Lesson 40 offers two² – a short definition from ADL's website, and the opening portion of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's \(IHRA\) definition](#).

ADL recommends that educators use the full IHRA definition. This legally non-binding working definition and its contemporary examples are well-regarded and provide guidance for capturing the ever-evolving manifestations of antisemitism. The U.S. State Department has used this definition since 2010, along with the European Union and others. ADL refers to it explicitly in our guide [Antisemitism Uncovered](#) and more broadly in our resources and lesson plans on antisemitism, including [BINAH: Building Insights to Navigate Antisemitism & Hate](#) our new suite of free online lessons about antisemitism for high school students.³ We respectfully **suggest that you include BINAH as an additional resource in the ESMC.**

The ESMC would also benefit from adding an overarching statement to the preface similar to the Introduction to the Los Angeles Unified School District’s “[Elements of a Balanced Curriculum](#).” In particular, we recommend this language from the guide:

At the college and university level, ethnic studies and related courses are sometimes taught from a specific political point of view or frame of reference. In K-12 education it is imperative that students are exposed to multiple perspectives, taught to think critically and form their own opinions on these and other issues.

Such guidance is a useful tool in addressing this complex subject.

Finally, we are **grateful that the revised draft includes ADL’s educational programming** in Appendix B’s Lesson Resources for educators.⁴ ADL Education Division professionals work tirelessly to develop lessons that “promote[] critical thinking and learning around historical and current events topics through the lens of diversity, bias and social justice.”⁵ We are pleased that our materials can be a resource to California students and teachers.

As we have written before, a pedagogically sound Ethnic Studies course incorporating “core values of equity, inclusiveness, and universally high expectations”⁶ will enrich California students’ understanding of American history and current events. The revised ESMC draft is another significant step towards achieving that goal. We look forward to following the ESMC review process and providing additional comment, as warranted.

Sincerely,



Nancy J. Appel
California Legislative Director

cc:

State Superintendent Tony Thurmond
Dr. Stephanie Gregson
Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
Shanine Coats

¹ Appendix A, lines 10363-75 and lines 10615-16.

² *Id.* at 10363-75.

³ Additional lesson plans may be found via the following links or by searching these titles at www.adl.org: [Antisemitism Around the World](#), [Deadly Shooting At Tree of Life Synagogue](#), [Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate, Activist](#), [The Resilience Antisemitism: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion](#), [Challenging Antisemitism: Debunking Myths and Responding with Facts](#), [Discussing Antisemitism: A Guide for Reflection and Conversation](#), [Alt-Right and White Supremacy](#), [Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols](#).

⁴ Appendix B, lines 344-49.

⁵ *Id.* at 346-48.

⁶ Education Code § 51226.7.