



## **Update on the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum: Where It Stands and What Its Broader Implications Are**

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In order to understand where the California ethnic studies curriculum stands now, as well as its broader implications, it's important to give some background.

In 2016, California state legislators passed a bill, AB 2016, mandating that the state's Department of Education (CDE) develop a model ethnic studies curriculum for use in high school ethnic studies courses. Although the bill stated that the goal of such courses was "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures," the politically motivated educators appointed by the CDE to help draft the model curriculum had other ideas. In June 2019, when the first draft of the model curriculum was released for public comment, it was firmly rooted in Critical Ethnic Studies, a narrow, politicized conceptualization of the field that limits its focus to specific identity groups, is firmly rooted in ideologies that divide society into oppressed and oppressor groups based primarily on race and class, and, as part of its disciplinary mission, uses the classroom to indoctrinate students into narrow political beliefs and activism. The first draft of the curriculum focused exclusively on "four core groups" and a few others favored by committee members, such as Arab Americans. It also diverged sharply from the politically neutral AB2016 in its promotion of partisan political agendas and activism, for instance equating capitalism with racism, lionizing "revolutionary" warriors, and advocating for student engagement in "tactics of resistance" and "direct action" such as anti-Israel boycotts.

Not surprisingly, the first draft was met with enormous outrage from the public, especially many in the Jewish community, who were incensed by the anti-Zionist thrust of the curriculum and its promotion of BDS, as well as that Jewish Americans and instruction on anti-Semitism were left out of the document. Members of the Jewish Legislative Caucus also roundly condemned the first draft, as did the Governor, who promised that it "would never see the light of day." The head of the State Board of Education agreed and sent the draft back to the drawing board for further revision in August 2019.

A year later, this past August, a second draft of the curriculum was released to the public, and a third was released just last month. On the surface, both of these revised drafts seem much improved over the rejected first draft: the overtly anti-Zionist material has been removed, some of the more highly politicized language has been deleted or watered

down, and material on Jewish Americans and anti-Semitism has been added. However, what has *not* changed is the curricular framework of the drafts, which remains firmly rooted in the principles of Critical Ethnic Studies, with its division of society into oppressed and oppressor based on race and class, its commitment to challenging “forms of power and oppression” as defined by neo-Marxist ideologies, and its encouragement of “transformative resistance.” In addition, and most profoundly concerning for the Jewish community, is that while both revised versions include lessons on Jewish Americans, the portrayal of Jews, filtered through the lens of Critical Ethnic Studies, is as “white” and “privileged” – clearly on the oppressor side of the race-class divide. At a time when anti-Jewish sentiment, hostility and violence has reached truly alarming levels, indoctrinating students to view Jews as “white” and “racially privileged” is tantamount to putting an even larger target on the back of every Jewish student.

The third draft curriculum is now being reviewed by the State Board of Education and is likely to be approved, with few changes, in March.

But there’s another twist in the ethnic studies curriculum story that’s important to be aware of. While the state educational offices have been busy revising the rejected first version of the curriculum, the original authors of that draft have been on a crusade to promote their highly politicized curriculum – including the anti-Zionist and BDS-promoting lessons -- throughout the state. Immediately after their draft was rejected they started an organization called Save CA Ethnic Studies and launched a petition demanding that the State Board of Education adopt their draft. After that they lobbied individual school districts throughout the state to vote on a resolution in support of their curriculum, and to date, at least 20 districts have adopted it. More recently, members of the original drafters established the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum coalition to further promote the rejected first draft as well as to offer school districts their educational expertise in implementing the curriculum in their schools.

Meanwhile, the recent revival of a state bill making a course in ethnic studies a graduation requirement in every California public and charter high school raises the stakes of the curriculum debate enormously. That bill, AB 101, recommends that school districts use the state’s model curriculum as the basis for the required courses, though it allows school districts to use any curriculum their board approves - even the original rejected draft being vigorously promoted by activists throughout the state.

Last year, realizing that coercing all high school students to take a highly politicized, divisive course in Critical Ethnic Studies would be a disaster for California students, especially Jewish students, AMCHA led a successful coalition effort urging the Governor to veto AB 331, the precursor of the recently introduced AB 101. In light of the near certainty that the state’s model curriculum will be rooted in Critical Ethnic Studies, as well as the aggressive and successful campaign by a group of educator-activists to promote the adoption and implementation of an even more radical curriculum in hundreds of school districts statewide, we will be opposing AB 101 as well.