



JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL
of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Remarks by Tyler Harris Gregory, Executive Director, JCRC To State Board of Education, California

March 18, 2021

Thank you to Superintendent Thurmond and the California Department of Education staff, members of the State Board of Education, Governor Newsom, and our friends in the legislature like Assemblymembers Gabriel, Chiu, and Medina, and Senator Allen for your partnership with the California Jewish community.

As a descendent of Holocaust survivors, it is my duty to ensure this state and this country remain safe for the Jewish community. We come together just two months after a Capitol insurrection that saw sweatshirts emblazoned with “Six Million wasn’t enough” and just two years after synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh and Poway, near San Diego, my hometown. And the chilling chant heard in Charlottesville of “Jews will not replace us” still echoes in all our ears.

While antisemitism extends far beyond our borders and history, it is also quite often a symptom of *other* sicknesses in our country, like declining faith in our democracy, like white supremacy, and like hyperpolarization and division. We must walk and chew gum at the same time: combatting antisemitism wherever it appears, while working with our neighbors to chip away at the deep rot beneath other forms of oppression like racism, sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia.

As our Asian Pacific Islander neighbors reel from Tuesday’s tragic Atlanta shooting; as our African American neighbors call for a national reckoning after the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others worth naming; as our Latino neighbors are targeted and scapegoated by xenophobes, and as the stories and lands of Indigenous peoples are erased – we recognize that the systemic injustices facing our neighboring communities of color, and *Jews* of color, often stem from the same causes of rising antisemitism.

Education is an essential strategy in combatting these injustices. To that end, I say that we need ethnic studies *now*. Ethnic studies gives marginalized communities the agency to define and share their own stories, cultures, and histories.

As Jewish Americans, we relate to this urgent need. For too long in our classrooms, and I know from my own experiences in San Diego public schools, Jewish identity has been flattened and distorted to that of a white religious minority, taking little note of our global peoplehood, history, diversity and oppression — not to mention erasing Jews of Color and Middle Eastern Jews almost entirely. We appreciate, for example, that Holocaust education appears in social studies courses. But education about Jews must be so much more than what has happened *to* us.

For consideration today are the inclusion of two Jewish lessons that obliterate the notion that Jews are a monolithic group and that lift up segments of our community that are too often invisible. Our crucial inclusion presents our *own* chance to impart the richness of our people, so that future generations hear the dog whistles of antisemitism that too often fall on deaf ears.

The CDE has devised a curriculum that honors the four founding disciplines of Ethnic Studies, *and* lifts up four additional communities with a deep history in our state with the interethnic bridge-building section: Jewish, Arab, Armenian, and Sikh Americans.

We know we cannot rest after today's deliberations. My organization, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and our Jewish community partners, will work tirelessly in partnership with the CDE and school districts all across our great state to ensure this curriculum is used inclusively in classrooms, to elevate the stories of marginalized communities, and ensure the teaching of Jewish and other lessons in the interethnic bridge-building section.

Thank you.