



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

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JCRC Reiterates Commitment to Teaching of Ethnic Studies, Vows to Ensure Robust Curriculum

***Newsom's Veto of Graduation Requirement 'Creates Time, Space
For Myriad Groups to Collaborate'***

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 30 – A leading Jewish organization reiterated late Wednesday its firm commitment to ensure that California's ethnic studies curriculum be rigorous, appropriate and reflective of California's diverse population, including communities of color too often overlooked in current coursework.

The announcement comes as Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed legislation (AB 331) that would have made ethnic studies a graduation requirement for public school students, though the California Department of Education has not yet finalized its model curriculum and will not until sometime next year.

The San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Community Relations Council appreciates the governor's leadership, as shown in Newsom's written response to the California State Assembly: "I am directing staff in my administration ... to ensure that the draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum achieves balance, fairness and is inclusive of all communities. In California, we don't tolerate diversity. We celebrate it. That should be reflected in our high school curriculum. I look forward to our model curriculum achieving these goals."

Tyler Gregory, executive director of the JCRC, the central public affairs arm in the region for the organized Jewish community, said, "We support ethnic studies and thank Governor Newsom for creating the time and space for the state to get it right when it comes to ethnic studies for high school students. This is an opportunity to work together to create an outstanding educational plan for K-12 students.

"Now, California can have an accurate and robust ethnic studies curriculum prior to a mandate to teach it, a major reason why the JCRC had no official position on AB 331."

The template for the implementation of the educational plan is officially known as the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. A final draft of the plan, created by AB 2016, will be released in November, to be followed by a public review period. It has an adoption deadline of March 2021.

JCRC officials also said they would continue to advocate for the inclusion of American Jewish narratives, as well as a meaningful definition of antisemitism, the world's oldest form of hatred, in the proposed curriculum.

“Without the addition of these elements, any educational plan will fail to realize its critical goal: advancing justice in the classroom for marginalized communities in the state of California,” Gregory said.

“It would be tragic, and highly ironic, if a curriculum designed to mitigate bigotry further marginalized Jewish students by denying Jewish ethnicity at a time of rising antisemitism and white nationalism in California and across this country.”

An initial draft of the curriculum both excluded Jews and included anti-Jewish, anti-Israel components. A second version suggested by the state Department of Education in early August removed the denigrating content but did nothing to remedy exclusion.

Roselyne Swig, philanthropist and JCRC board member, said, “Our goal is not to have anyone excluded, but for an accurate representation of California's diverse Jewish population, which includes Jews of color and those from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia.”

The JCRC has specifically called for:

- the inclusion of a meaningful definition of antisemitism;
- no return of the derogatory language about Jews, Israelis and Israel, with guardrails in place to keep such language out of the classroom in the future;
- and the addition of a sample lesson reflecting the diversity of Jewish Americans.

“We believe that the interests of our Jewish community and those of other ethnic groups are aligned,” Gregory said, “and we look forward to working in coalition with them to advance our shared values in the classroom.”

About the JCRC

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties is the central public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community and represents more than 60 synagogues and Jewish organizations on critical issues affecting the Bay Area Jewish community.

In other recent advocacy efforts, JCRC backed three statewide ballot initiatives – Propositions 15, 16 and 17 – that reflect its Jewish values, especially at a time of structural racism and economic inequality in the United States.

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