



May 29, 2020

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

The Honorable Tony Thurmond,

We are writing you to express the critical need for the California Department of Education (CDE) to take immediate action to protect California Jewish students who are targeted and discriminated against because of their religious beliefs and identity.

Antisemitism is growing in California public schools, particularly in middle schools and high schools. Manifestations of antisemitism span not only classic tropes of Jew-hatred but also include expressions of hate and delegitimization of the Jewish State.

A recent survey conducted by Club Z, a national Zionist youth movement, indicates that schools are failing to provide Jewish teenagers with a safe learning environment. Jewish students are openly ridiculed and harassed by their classmates and in some cases even by their teachers. In one top California school, a teacher made the appalling claim that “Jews didn’t really do anything productive over the course of their existence. They mostly just wandered the desert killing their own babies.” This hate is also found in school textbooks and curricula. The Palo Alto Unified School District recommended third through fifth graders read a book glorifying Hitler. Additional examples range from CA teachers assigning [Hitler-inspired projects](#) to [Nazi salutes](#) and [graffiti](#) to normalized [antisemitic rhetoric](#) among students.

Making matters even more alarming is the CDE’s 2019 Draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that excludes Jews as an ethnic minority, demonizes Jewish self-determination, and supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, while promoting misinformation and Jewish stereotypes. We appreciate that you stood with members of the California Legislative Jewish Caucus in calling for significant revisions to the Curriculum. Yet, the outcome of the Curriculum remains in flux and the January 2020 recommendation that the Curriculum focus on “four foundational groups” signals that the concerns raised by the Jewish community, their allies, and other minority groups will be disregarded.

We are therefore calling on the CDE to adopt the attached Jewish Students’ Bill of Rights to safeguard the rights of Jewish students in California. The universal rights outlined in the document are the most basic things that every student deserves: (1) The Right to Free Expression (2) The Right to a Fair Education (3) The Right to a Safe Learning Environment (4) The Right to a Comprehensive Definition of Antisemitism, and (5) The Right to Fair Protections.

Superintendent, thank you for your work in safeguarding the rights of Jewish students. We believe the enclosed Jewish Students' Bill of Rights will afford further necessary protections from harassment, bullying, and antisemitism for Jewish students in California public middle schools and high schools. We appreciate your consideration of this document and we look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Masha Merkulova". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Masha" being more prominent than the last name "Merkulova".

Masha Merkulova
Founder and Executive Director, Club Z

cc: Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
President, California State Board of Education

Dr. Ilene Straus
Vice President, California State Board of Education

Jose Iniguez
Chair, Instructional Quality Commission