



Educators for Quality and Equality

April 8, 2021

VIA EMAIL

Members of the State Board of Education

Members of the Instructional Quality Commission

Governor Gavin Newsom

State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond

The Honorable Tony Thurmond

mathframework@cde.ca.gov

Dear Members of the CA State Board of Education, Members of the Instructional Quality Commission, SBE President Linda Darling-Hammond, Governor Gavin Newsom, and State Superintendent Tony Thurmond:

As educators, we support school curricula that confront racism, develop civic responsibility, and help students build the 21st century skills that they need to succeed in school, work, and life. We rely on the State Board of Education (SBE) to provide frameworks, standards, and resource materials that help us to achieve these goals.

To that end, we are deeply concerned about the draft 2021 CA Mathematics Framework, which contains discriminatory and divisive content that will impede us from accomplishing these important goals in math instruction.

The ideology behind this discriminatory and divisive content is critical race theory. According to Britannica, critical race theory is the theory that race “is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of colour [and that] racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that white people create between ‘races’ to maintain elite white interests...giving rise to poverty and criminality in many minority communities.”¹

¹ Curry, Tommy. “Critical Race Theory.” Essay. In *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory>. Accessed April 7, 2021

Derrick Bell, the originator of critical race theory, writes that ““racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society”² and that “whites continue, consciously or unconsciously, to do all in their power to ensure their dominion and maintain their control.”³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, critical race theory authority, asserts that racism “is embedded in the structure of society.”⁴

The discriminatory content in the draft Mathematics Framework cited below reflects these core tenets of critical race theory. The following is not a comprehensive compilation of discriminatory content in the Mathematics Framework; rather, it is a sample of the problematic content we discovered in our review:

- **Equitablemath.org website and its accompanying guide, “A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction” are included key resources for teaching math.** This resource and guide are recommended three times within the draft CA Mathematics Framework. They include numerous discriminatory, political, and inflammatory content, including:
 - **“A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction” labels numerous commonly-used math teaching methods as “white supremacy culture.”** This includes labeling as “white supremacy culture” common pedagogy such as “addressing mistakes,” “(when) I do, we do, you do is the format of the class,” and “(when) state standards drive learning in the classroom.”

While the resource includes better, alternative teaching methods, this divisive terminology results in alienating educators and tarnishing these improved methods by association with racism. The benefits of adopting better math pedagogy do not require other methods to be characterized as “white supremacy.” In addition, it is best practice in education to encourage a growth mindset. Labeling teachers who haven’t yet learned an improved pedagogy as complicit in “white supremacy” is both discriminatory and undermines the growth mindset tenet of [“embracing challenge and mistakes”](#) that is essential for professional growth.

In addition, “A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction” misuses the term “white supremacy” as a race-based generalization that singles out one race for opprobrium. According to the definition approved by the SBE on March 18 in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, “white supremacy” is “the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups, in particular black or Jewish people.” (OED/Lexico)

² Bell, D. (2018). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York: Basic Books.

³ Bell, Derrick A. (2008) “And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice (New York: Basic Books)

⁴ Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015) ‘More than Prejudice: Restatement, Reflections, and New Directions in Critical Race Theory’, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), pp. 73–87.

- **“A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction” directs educators to “identify and challenge the ways that math is used to uphold capitalist, imperialist, and racist views”**

This statement instructs teachers to impose a specific, anti-capitalist viewpoint on students. This opposes both California state standards and best practices in education, which call for a presentation of multiple viewpoints and specifically guide against imposition of a single political ideology.

If a math course is to include a discussion of capitalism or other economic systems, then it must present them in a balanced way. This would include providing objective sources on capitalism and other systems, with the goal of helping students to develop the skills required to analyze multiple perspectives and form their own evidence-based opinions. This would conform to California state standards, which call for curricula to include “a balance of topics, authors, and concepts, including primary and secondary sources that represent multiple, and sometimes opposing, points of view or perspectives.”⁵

- **Calling for teachers to “Expose students to examples of people who have used math as resistance” and “Provide learning opportunities that use math as resistance.”**

This statement directs teachers to promote “resistance” to students, and implies to students that “resistance” is a desirable application of their math learning. The statement does not define “resistance,” nor does it include a context for what “resistance” means.

There are various types of “resistance.” Resistance can be violent, as in the January Capitol uprising. Resistance can be non-violent, as advocated for by Dr. Martin Luther King. This broad characterization of “resistance” as a desirable outcome imposes a one-sided political viewpoint that opposes both California state standards and best practices in education, which call for a presentation of multiple viewpoints and specifically guide against imposition of a single political ideology.

- **The Mathematics Framework cites “Access to mathematics: ‘A possessive investment in whiteness” (Battey, D. 2013).** This paper is cited in Chapter 2. It includes numerous discriminatory and pejorative statements about white people, including:
 - “Whiteness creates an ideal race, with which to devalue and subsequently oppress other racial groups. Understood in this way, whiteness has a dual nature:

⁵ History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, 2016

privileging Whites and oppressing those under the boundary of White.”

- “Moreover, whiteness oppresses blackness through deficit ideas, poor treatment, and lower quality of instruction.”
- “...an identity of whiteness serves to constrain a teacher educator in discussing equity with future teachers.”

These discriminatory and pejorative statements do not serve to inspire all educators or to improve math pedagogy. Rather, they are used to connote that all racism and discrimination is perpetrated by white people. They reflect the critical race theory generalization that singles out one race for opprobrium. This is a violation of Federal and CA law and SBE rules: do not discriminate, demean, stereotype, or divide students.

- **The Mathematics Framework Includes the false statement: “Mathematics education in the United States was initially structured for a narrow purpose: to prepare privileged, young, white men for entrance into elite colleges.”**

This statement is attributed to a source ([Furr 1996](#)) that does not include this information. This incorrect statement falsely implies that classism and racism were responsible for limited math education in the United States.

The full source states (emphasis added): “The rise of universal, free, compulsory education together with new college entrance requirements and the continuing need for basic commercial computational skills meant a *significant increase in the number of students who were being taught arithmetic and a similar increase in the few privileged boys learning algebra and geometry.*”

This mischaracterization of the primary source is both inflammatory and divisive. It promotes critical race theory’s accusation that racism is permanent and implies that math education has always been based on a racist, classist divide. In addition, it perpetuates the misconception that all gaps in math achievement are and have been race-based. This is historically incorrect and in opposition to CA Education Code, which states that “instructional materials ...shall be...accurate, objective, and current and suited to the needs and comprehension of pupils.”

- **The Mathematics Framework states misleading statistics**, including that, “In California in the years 2004–2014, 32 percent of Asian American students were in gifted programs compared with 8 percent of White students, 4 percent of Black students, and 3 percent of Latinx students (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.80.asp).”

However, in the specific source cited, 40 percent of Latino students, 32 percent of White students, 20 percent of Asian American students, and 6 percent of Black students were enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Gender representation was approximately

equal.

This mischaracterization of the statistics promotes critical race theory's accusation that racism is permanent, and implies that all opportunity gaps in math education are race-based, and ignores the important progress made by various ethnic groups over time.

The inclusion of critical race theory in the draft CA Math Frameworks goes against California State Board of Education's obligation to not adopt instructional materials "that contain any matter reflecting adversely upon persons on the basis of race." (CA Education Code Section 51501). It also goes against our obligation as California teachers to "impress upon the minds of the pupils ...the promotion of harmonious relations" and not promote "discriminatory bias on the basis of race" in our classrooms. (CA Education Code Sections 233.5(a) and 51500).

Please see Attachment 1 for additional laws, codes, and standards that are related to our request.

On behalf of California educators and students, we request that you remove the discriminatory resources identified in this letter, thoroughly review all material and resources in the Mathematics Framework, and produce a Mathematics Framework that reflects sound, research-based practices over political ideology throughout.

Sincerely,

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Attachment 1: Laws, Standards, and Guidelines

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The following table contains laws, standards, and guidelines that relate to our request.

Laws, Standards, and Guidelines	Citation
<p>Discrimination Based on Religion/Race/Ethnicity: Not Permitted</p>	<p><u>US Constitution</u> Article I, Section 4: Free exercise and enjoyment of religion without discrimination or preference are guaranteed.</p> <p><u>Federal Civil Rights Act</u> 42 U.S.C. Section 2000d. No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color or national origin be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.</p> <p><u>California Constitution</u> Article I, Section 31(a) The State shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race..., ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of... public education...[(f)...'State' shall include... school district...]</p> <p><u>California Education Code</u> Section 220. No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of ... nationality, race or ethnicity, religion...in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance...</p> <p>Section 51500. A teacher shall not give instruction and a school district shall not sponsor any activity that promotes a discriminatory bias on the basis of race or ethnicity, ...religion...nationality...</p>
<p>Instruction and Instructional Materials: Must Promote Harmonious Relations, Be Accurate, Be Objective, Be Suited to Students' Needs & Not</p>	<p><u>California Education Code</u> Section 233.5 (a) Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils ...the promotion of harmonious relations...</p> <p>Section 60010(h) "Instructional materials" means all materials that are designed for use by pupils and their teachers as a learning resource.</p>

<p>Reflect Adversely on Religion/Race/Ethnicity</p>	<p>Section 51501. The state board and any governing board shall not adopt any ...instructional materials for use in the public schools that contain any matter reflecting adversely upon persons on the basis of race or ethnicity, ...religion...nationality...</p> <p>Section 60044. A governing board shall not adopt any instructional materials for use in the schools that, in its determination, contain (a) any matter reflecting adversely upon persons on the basis of race or ethnicity,...religion ...nationality...</p> <p>Section 60045. All instructional materials ...shall be...accurate, objective, and current and suited to the needs and comprehension of pupils."</p>
<p>The State Board of Education Approved Standards & Guidelines</p>	<p><u>Social Content Standards</u> <i>(approved by the State Board of Education May 2013)</i></p> <p>"Intended to help end stereotyping in instructional materials by showing diverse people in positive roles contributing to society."</p> <p>"Instructional materials used by students in California public schools should never portray in an adverse or inappropriate way the groups referenced in the laws."</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Adverse reflection. Descriptions, depictions, labels, or rejoinders that tend to demean, stereotype, or patronize minority groups are prohibited"</p> <p>"The standards enable all students to become aware and accepting of religious diversity while being allowed to remain secure in any religious beliefs they may already have....without displaying bias toward or prejudice against any of those beliefs or religious beliefs in general."</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Adverse reflection. No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."</p>