



March 30, 2020

California Department of Education
1430 N St #5901
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Sikh inclusion in California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

To California Department of Education, Instructional Quality Commission, State Board of Education Officials, and California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee:

On behalf of the estimated 250,000 Sikh Americans who have lived in California for 125 years, we write to request revisions and inclusions to California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. As two of the leading Sikh organizations in the country specializing in K-12 education standards and creating more inclusive classrooms, we have previously worked to make California's 2016 H-SS Framework more inclusive for Sikhism. We look forward to working with you as well.

The detailed suggested revisions and additions will make the model curriculum more robust and ensure that it better addresses the cultural values, traditions, indigeneity, and histories of the diverse populations in California's schools.

We are cognizant of the following arguments in making these requests:

1. While we recognize that the draft curriculum focuses on the four original ethnic studies areas, exceptions *have* been made for the inclusion of entire units and lesson plans about additional populations. Given that the largest Sikh population in the United States lives in California (approximately 250,000 with 74 Sikh houses of worship), the density of Sikh populations in numerous school districts (examples include Central Unified and Yuba City Unified, which have approximately 12% Sikh students—some of the highest Sikh student populations in the country), and the rising number of bias, bullying, and hate crimes against Sikhs in California (according to the Sikh Coalition, since 2015 no state has had more anti-Sikh hate crimes in the nation), it is imperative that Sikh Americans are included in the curriculum in a meaningful way. **We propose this should be through a lesson plan about the Sikh American community, which can be easily inserted in the Asian American studies course.**
2. While we appreciate that Sikhs are mentioned in the draft curriculum, this does not suffice. Such minimal representation would result in further marginalization and misunderstanding of the Sikh community. A lesson plan would help rectify these issues:
 - A. In the first instance, two examples of potential significant Sikh figures are given to cover in the Asian American studies course. However, without any context and suggested resources, it is difficult for teachers to implement this.



- B. In the second instance, Sikhs are included in the context of Islamophobia and backlash against Arab Americans post 9-11. While the inclusion of Sikh Americans is important in this context, only encountering certain communities through the lens of victimization results in the continued flattening and dehumanization of these communities. Given the immigration stories of Sikhs in California, their immensely positive contributions to the state, and their significant density in the K-12 student population in more than 20 school districts¹, it is imperative that they are also included in the model curriculum in a *positive* way that highlights their unique stories and contributions in a distinct context—not in comparison to other communities.
3. While we understand that there are opportunities to teach about Sikhism in California's H-SS Framework, Sikh students and parents repeatedly share their dissatisfaction that this is not being implemented in California classrooms because it does not trickle down into Curriculum and Instruction or teacher training. According to the Sikh Coalition's 2008, 2010, and 2014 community surveys and anti-bullying reports, Sikh children continue to be bullied at disproportionate rates in California's classrooms. The most recent 2014 report found that the majority of Sikh children, just over 50%, endure school bullying. And the numbers are worse for turbaned Sikh children: more than two-thirds, or 67%, reported that they are bullied in school². Meaningful inclusion in the model curriculum through a lesson plan about Sikh Americans (appropriate for Grades 9-12), that is both inquiry-based and consistent with the content and instructional shifts in the H-SS Framework, will complement the Framework and finally enable teachers to build on the Framework's goals (where Sikhism is only included in Grades 4, 7, and 8).
 4. While we realize that teachers have the control to create culturally responsive and community relevant lessons based on the model curriculum, this is difficult to do in an accurate way when educators and administrators have limited time and resources. It is therefore essential that a lesson plan about Sikh Americans be included in the model curriculum from the outset, so that the Sikh community does not continue to feel underrepresented and misrepresented in California's classrooms.

¹ Kern High School District, Panama-Buena Vista Union School District, Selma Unified School District, Central Unified School District, Kerman Unified School District, Clovis Unified School District, Fresno Unified School District, Livingston Union Elementary School District, Turlock Unified School District, Ceres Unified School District, Manteca Unified School District, Stockton Unified School District, Elk Grove Unified School District, Sacramento Unified School District, Yuba City Unified School District, Merced Union High School District, New Haven Unified School District, LA Unified School District, Irvine Unified School District, and Riverside Unified School District.

² "[Go Home, Terrorist](#)": A Report on the Bullying of Sikh American School Children by the Sikh Coalition (2014).



5. Having communities learn about Sikh identity and culture in ethnic studies is immensely valuable as a mode of preparing students for the globalized world. As the fifth largest world religion, Sikhs are amongst the most visible of minorities that students will encounter, so understanding their identity and culture will equip students to engage meaningfully with and appreciate the diversity they will engage.

It is in this vein that we are asking for the following revisions and inclusions to be made:

Line 718 - Sample Theme #3 Migration

Suggestion: Add the intense migration periods for South Asians from the early 1800's to California here as an example.

Suggested text for inclusion: Students can explore South Asian immigration to California. The challenges and opportunities faced by South Asian immigrants to California will allow students to learn about socio-economic issues, identity, religion, culture, racism, immigration reform and legislation, and political contributions to anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements. For example, the 1800s progressing to the early 20th century saw waves of workers on the Western Pacific Railroad in 1910 and former soldiers who had served in the British colonial army in East Asia. Legislation such as *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923)* and the US *Immigration and Nationality Act (1965)* affected South Asian immigration significantly. The contributions of Dalip Singh Saund to politics, opened doors for minority communities to rise above prejudice and racism when he became the first-ever Asian, the first Indian, and the first Sikh to be elected to the United States Congress (1957-1963). The founding of Stockton Gurdwara, the first-ever Sikh place of worship in the United States in 1912, served as a focal point for immigrants across communities, and was linked to the founding of the Gadar Party, which opposed British rule in India.

Line 863 - Materials and Resources for sample lesson plan on Migration Stories and Oral History, 9–12

Suggested resources for inclusion: Add the following resources to help Sikh students explore their personal stories around how migration has impacted their families and how their migration stories connect to local history:

- [Lesson plan on Sikh immigration to Stockton, California](#)
- [Viewing and Discussion Guide for CNN's United Shades Of America episode about the Sikh community in Northern California](#)
- [SAADA: South Asian American Digital Archive](#)

- [Dalip Singh Saund: His Life, His Legacy](#)

Lines 5988-5989 - Sample lesson plan 4 on Islamophobia – What is it and how can it be challenged? 9–12

Current text: *Ask the question – Is anyone here Muslim or feels they are often labeled Muslim when you are not? (If anyone raises their hand, ask them to feel free add and comment to any content that is being presented as this lesson on Islamophobia – the experiences of Arab Americans in dealing with it will be discussed. But to not feel any pressure to represent their whole community.)*

Suggestion: This question should be revised. It is significantly problematic because the burden to defend or explain the experiences of a community should not be the responsibility of the student. The way in which the question is framed is also problematic, because it equates being labeled Muslim as something negative. Furthermore, this question can be emotionally triggering to students across communities who have encountered difficult personal experiences.

Suggested text for inclusion:

- Ask students to think about the challenges that occur when people who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim are targeted with Islamophobic sentiment.
- Ask students to imagine that they are in a coffee shop and someone who is Muslim or perceived to be Muslim walks in. What are some of the negative stereotypes that other customers in the coffee shop might make?
- Explore the example of [AB1964](#), which illustrates how workplaces deal with this kind of discrimination in California.

Lines 6051 - Sample lesson plan 4 on Islamophobia - What is it and how can it be challenged? 9–12 (Under teacher discussion notes)

Current text: *“The worst effects is the violence that is carried out against Muslims in which some acts lead to deaths.”*

Suggested edits: “The worst effect is the hate violence and murders that are carried out against Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs*, and other South Asians.”

*Teacher note: The first person killed in a hate crime post 9-11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh, from Arizona. Hate crimes against Sikhs have continued until present time. The largest incident was on August 5, 2012 when a neo-Nazi opened fire in a Gurdwara which led to the immediate death of six Sikhs and another died later as a result of his injuries.



Line 6107 - Materials and Resources for sample lesson plan 4 on Islamophobia, – What is it and how can it be challenged? 9–12

Suggested resources for inclusion: Add the following resources in order for students to engage meaningfully with the intersection of Sikh identity and Islamophobia post 9-11:

- “[Confused Islamophobes Target American Sikhs](#)” Comedy Central Daily Show segment on Sikh identity with Trevor Noah (April 15, 2016). 5 minute video.
- “[Religious Groups Find Common Ground as Targets of Hate](#)” featuring Sikh Coalition, by News 21 (2019). 10 minute video.
- “[Divided We Fall](#)” by Valerie Kaur and Sharat Raju, on the Sikh experience following 9/11 (2008). 90 minute film; opening sequence 7 minutes. Lesson plans available [here](#).
- “[Waking in Oak Creek](#)” by Milwaukee PBS, exploring the most widely known hate crime committed against the Sikh community, the horrific 2012 Oak Creek Massacre (2014). 60 minute documentary.

The lesson plan we are proposing for inclusion in the Asian American unit is attached. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions please reach out to the Sikh Coalition’s Education Director, Dr Pritpal Kaur (pritchal@sikhcoalition.org). We look forward to engaging with your team and seeing the ethnic studies model curriculum become more inclusive and diverse.

Yours sincerely,

Satjeet Kaur
Executive Director
The Sikh Coalition

Naindeep Singh
Executive Director
Jakara Movement



Attachment: The Sikh-American community in California *Lesson Plan*

The following lesson plan has been structured using the Sample Lesson Template for the California Ethnic Studies model curriculum, and is modified content from the C3 [Middle/High School Sikh Religion Inquiry](#) created in collaboration with [Dr. Kathy Swan](#) from C3Teachers, and the Sikh Coalition. It is intended for insertion into the Asian American studies course of the proposed Ethnic Studies model curriculum. We are willing to work with your Curriculum and Instruction experts to refine this content if necessary.

Lesson Title	The Sikh-American community in California
Grade level(s):	9-12
Ethnic studies values and principles alignment:	1, 2, 3
Standards alignment:	<p>H-SS Framework alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chapter 7 - Grade 4 - California: A Changing State ● Chapter 11 - Grade 7 - World History and Geography: Medieval and Early Modern Times ● Chapter 12 - Grade 8 - United States History and Geography: Growth and Conflict
Lesson purpose and overview:	
<p>This lesson introduces students to the history of Sikh immigration to the United States West Coast, patterns of settlement, and how the Sikh community has responded to the challenges and opportunities they have encountered in California over time. This lesson plan can be used at any time immigration is being discussed, but is designed to explore the history of Sikh contributions to California.</p>	
Key ethnic studies terms and concepts:	
<p>assimilation, integration, stereotype, identity, racism, religion, culture, migration, diaspora, farming, industry, economy</p>	

Pre-requisite skills and knowledge:

Given the often lack of accurate information about Sikhism in K-12 classrooms, this lesson plan has been designed to assume no or little prior knowledge about Sikhism. Students are expected to be familiar with the ethnic studies concepts of migration, culture, and identity.

Content and language objectives:

Students will be able to understand Sikh identity, Sikh migration to California, and Sikh contributions to California's history through articles and videos.

They will have opportunities to address essential and compelling questions through tasks such as creating lists, graphics, writing paragraphs, and conducting arguments with evidence from featured historical and contemporary sources.

Essential questions:

1. What is Sikhism?
2. How did Sikhs immigrate to California?
3. How did Sikhs shape Californian history?

Lesson plans/activities:

This lesson has been structured into 3 parts to address the 3 essential questions. It is expected to take 4-5 40-minute class periods, but can be adapted as necessary.

1. What is Sikhism?

The first essential question has students understanding the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Sikh religion. The formative performance task asks students to list the important tenets of Sikhism using featured sources.

The featured sources for this question are two short video clips from CNN's show *United Shades of America* with W. Kamau Bell and an informational chapter about Sikhism from the National Council for the Social Studies. [Featured Source A](#) is a 4 minute and 40 second clip featuring an introduction to Sikhism. [Featured Source B](#) is also a video clip (3 minutes 8 seconds) on the Sikh turban. [Featured Source C](#) is a short chapter about Sikhism from the

National Council for the Social Studies bulletin, *Teaching About Religion in the Social Studies Classroom*.

Formative Performance Task: Make a list of the important tenets of Sikhism.

2. How did Sikhs immigrate to California?

For this question, students create a graphic that shows how Sikhs immigrated to America noting the contextual factors that impacted the community using featured sources.

[Featured Source A](#) is another short video segment from CNN's *United Shades of America* with W. Kamau Bell. The clip discusses farming and Sikh immigration to the United States. [Featured Source B](#) is a world map of Punjab, India, illustrating the route Sikhs took to the United States. [Featured Source C](#) is a newspaper article from The Washington Post by Benjamin Gottlieb (2012) entitled, *Punjabi Sikh-Mexican American community fading into history*. [Featured Source D](#) is a speech by Bruce La Brack (2011) entitled, *A Century of Sikhs in California*.

Formative Performance Task: Create a graphic that shows how Sikhs immigrated to California noting the contextual factors that impacted the community.

3. How did Sikhs shape Californian history?

This question asks students to write a paragraph about one of the featured case studies focusing on how that example shaped an aspect of American history.

Featured Sources A-C are case studies on the following: [Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany](#), [Dalip Singh Saund](#), and the [AB1964 policy](#). Together, these sources focus on three unique and compelling stories of how the Sikh community has shaped American history.

Formative Performance Task: Write a paragraph about one of the case studies and how that example shaped an aspect of Californian history.

Summative performance task:

Argument

How have Sikh Americans responded to the challenges and opportunities in California? Construct an argument (e.g. detailed outline, poster, essay) that discusses this compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the historical and contemporary sources.

Taking informed action

- **Assessment:** Examine how CNN's *United Shades of America* show on the Sikh community in Northern California's attempts to raise awareness about Sikhism.
- **Application:** Discuss how using popular media and pop culture may shape attitudes towards Sikhs.
- **Action and Reflection:** Determine how you might help the Sikh community with their campaign.

Lesson modifications/accommodations for students with diverse needs:

Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries in order to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Assessment, application, action and reflection:

Integrated into lesson plan and summative performance task.

Materials and resources:

Sources for Essential Question 1: **Source A:** Video, *United Shades of America*, W. Kamau Bell, [Introduction to Sikhism segment](#), **Source B:** Video, *United Shades of America*, W. Kamau Bell, [Sikh turban segment](#), **Source C:** [Chapter about Sikhism](#) from NCSS publication.

Sources for Essential Question 2: **Source A:** Video, *United Shades of America*, W. Kamau Bell, [Farming and immigration segment](#), **Source B:** [World Map of the Punjab and route to United States](#), **Source C:** Article, [Punjabi Sikh-Mexican American community fading into history](#) (2012) by Benjamin Gottlieb, **Source D:** Speech, [A Century of Sikhs in California](#) (2011) by Bruce La Brack.

Sources for Essential Question 3: **Source A:** Case Study, [Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany](#), **Source B:** Case Study, [Dalip Singh Saund](#), **Source C:** Case Study, [AB1964 policy](#).