



April 13, 2016

State Board of Education
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: History-Social Science Framework Adoption

Dear Dr. Kirst, Ms. Rucker, Dr. Sandoval, and members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

We write on behalf of the Hindu American Foundation (“HAF”) to seek clarity on the process in light of a number of developments, including the apparent deference granted to the South Asia Faculty Group during the most recent phase of the frameworks adoption process. Accordingly, we request responses to the questions outlined below.

As you may know, HAF is an advocacy group for the Hindu American community that seeks to promote dignity, mutual respect and pluralism. HAF, several other Hindu American groups, Hindu American students, and a substantial number of scholars of Hinduism, comparative religion, and history, have been actively involved in the History-Social Science framework adoption process over the past two years. These groups and individuals have worked diligently to ensure that Hinduism, Hindus, and Ancient and Middle Age India are portrayed in ways that are both historically accurate, culturally competent, and inclusive. We at HAF have made it clear through our submissions that one of our priorities is that all instructional materials approved for students in California are also equitable and free from bias or negative stereotypes.

We have generally been pleased with the careful review afforded the History-Social Science frameworks. While not all suggested edits from HAF and other Hindu groups and scholars have been accepted, we believed that a good faith effort was being made to seriously consider all proposed edits and use the editing process to ensure both an accurate and culturally competent portrayal of Hinduism and Ancient and Middle Age India.

However, a number of recent developments have given rise to our growing concern about the fairness and transparency of the frameworks adoption process. For approximately two years, numerous scholars from relevant areas of study have submitted proposed edits along with explanations and academic corroboration. A relatively small number of these edits were approved and incorporated into subsequent drafts, and in some cases, rejected, or not specifically approved.

At the end of February 2016, a group calling itself the “South Asia Faculty” submitted a broad set of revisions to the materials that everyone has been laboring over so intensively for the last two years. The writing team – the “California History-Social Science Project” (“CHSSP”) -- released its [list of recommendations](#) shortly after. This list appeared to more or less accept the



vast majority of this group's edits -- an unprecedented 80% acceptance rate -- with little or no explanation. Moreover, the group's recommendations were then treated as the "default" recommendations of the History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee at its March 24, 2016 meeting. We also take this opportunity to point to a virtually identical set of proposed edits submitted by this same group in November of 2015 that was presumably rejected as evidenced by the lack of such edits having been incorporated in the [December 18th draft](#).

Please note that many of the South Asia Faculty Group requested edits called for eliminating several key references to "India" and "Hinduism" – despite the fact that both are required by the Content Standards that are supposed to be the touchstone for the frameworks. Many edits also contradict suggested edits submitted by other scholars over the past two years. Lastly, some of the South Asia Faculty Group edits override edits that were already accepted and incorporated into previous drafts.

We are concerned on several levels. First, important decisions about the content of the framework appear to have been outsourced or delegated to the [CHSSP](#), for which Nancy McTygue serves as Executive Director. We have participated actively in this process and have reviewed the public documents, yet it is unclear to us how an entity described at one point as a "consultant" became officially designated as the "writing team" whose positions would become the "default" positions of the IQC, unless affirmatively changed. The designation of the CHSSP does not appear to be contemplated by statute, the regulations, or any public decision-making.

We would appreciate clarity on the following:

1. What is the role of CHSSP? Is it contractual, advisory, or something else?
2. What is the relationship between the CHSSP and the Curriculum Frameworks and Criteria Evaluation Committee (CFCC) and or the IQC, which, according to the California Education Code and CDE resources, both are tasked with drafting and developing the frameworks?
3. What section of statutes, California Education Code, and/or administrative law code would govern the hiring, contracting, and/or retaining of CHSSP, and the SBE and/or CFCC relationship with CHSSP?
4. What public notice requirements, if any, govern the relationship?

Second, the CHSSP, in turn, appears to have outsourced or delegated broad authority over certain sections of the frameworks to the so-called "South Asia Faculty Group." The decision to privilege the submissions of some scholars over others (for example, [here](#) and [here](#)) was made without explanation and, from HAF's perspective, without any reasonable basis. Again, the official or unofficial designation of these persons as "experts" appears to have occurred outside of the process, and without any public discussion or public input. Alarming, despite submissions over the past few years from numerous scholars, the viewpoints of any scholars not in agreement with the "South Asia Faculty" have been trivialized as "community group representatives" or "interested individuals," in spite of their well-established and respected standing in academia.

Accordingly:

1. Are signatories to the South Asia Faculty Group designated Content Review Experts?
2. If so, did they apply through the proper procedures and in accordance with California Education Code §9513 or any relevant regulations? When and where was the list of applicants and their applications made available to the public?
3. If not, what exactly is the group's role in the drafting of the frameworks?

At the March 24 meeting, Ms. McTygue acknowledged more than a dozen times that she had absolutely no expertise in the areas being discussed relevant to India and Hinduism and that she was unable to substantively evaluate or explain any of the edits from the "South Asia Faculty" that she was recommending. She simply insisted that deference should be given to "the scholars," implicitly arguing that no deference or even acknowledgement was appropriate for any other scholars and suggesting no reasonable way of resolving the seeming disputes.

We are aware that Professor Sudipta Sen, one of the "South Asia Faculty," is a close colleague of Ms. Nancy McTygue -- [both worked](#) on the CHSSP's History Blueprint Project. So, our third concern arises from this close relationship and the deference accorded by Ms. McTygue to the judgments and opinions of Professor Sen and the other "South Asia" writers prior to and on March 24. We are disturbed by at least the appearance of ex parte conversations and potential conflicts of interest, both of which are inconsistent with the public process that has been underway for the last two years. It bears repeating that none of these group members, to the best of our knowledge, have any official role in the process, nor have they been publicly vetted in a way that would justify the deference accorded to them by members of the SBE, IQC, SMC, or CFCC in this instance. Incidentally, two other CDE/SBE members, including Dr. Tom Adams, are listed as members of the advisory council of this same CHSSP History Blueprint Project.

To this end:

1. Have any of these relationships or other relationships between members of the CDE, SBE, IQC, CFCC, or SMC and CHSSP and/or individual members of the South Asia Faculty group been vetted or cleared for potential conflicts of interest?
2. How are any potential conflicts of interest documented and/or addressed?

To be clear, HAF believes that the South Asia Faculty Group is not representative of the expanse of scholarship as it relates to India and Hinduism. Many of these faculty are well recognized as activists who frequently initiate, promote, and join various online petitions decrying and overtly opposing American and Indian policies as well as Hindu American advocacy efforts on a variety of fronts. They clearly have a theoretical and political perspective, and one that often is reflected in their academic work. While they are entitled to that, *it is only one perspective among many.*

Particularly in the History-Social Science setting, many competing theories and approaches have been in vogue over the years. The South Asia Faculty's own letter acknowledged that the



use of “ancient India” was “*accepted usage*” among many academics and that there is no “standard usage across fields.” Moreover, as experts on “South Asia” (and the Middle East), it should be noted that this group did not submit critical edits for the way in which other religions present in India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh were portrayed, nor for the histories of these countries. And while they have sought to re-link the social practice of caste with Hinduism and remove the contributions of Hindu sages of diverse backgrounds, their edits all but ignore caste and the social evil of caste-based discrimination as practiced across every religious group in India (and South Asia). They also offered little to no significant edits with regard to issues of gender inequality and patriarchy prevalent in many of the other religions, cultures, and civilizations in which they claim expertise.

We draw your attention to the above observations because we believe that it is simply inappropriate – and contrary to the statutory directives – for the Board to elevate one group’s perspective (especially one that is perceived as hostile to Hinduism) rather than trying to reconcile various perspectives in a way that results in a neutral portrayal in the texts. We would thus urge re-examining the way in which the South Asia Faculty Group have been approved, as well as how other scholars have been received and largely dismissed, especially in light of 1) the ambiguity of CHSSP’s status in the public process; 2) the close relationships and potential conflicts of interest detailed above; and 3) the CHSSP/writing team’s privileging of a particular political and theoretical perspective over others.

We are not requesting that the Board accept HAF’s edits, nor any other edits, uncritically, and we are appreciative of efforts made by IQC Vice Chair, Mr. Bill Honig, at the March 24 meeting to try to reconcile competing points of view to some extent. However, we are concerned about the precedent being set when the actual decision-making seems to be delegated so manifestly to private groups and individuals in a way that completely undermines public confidence.

We respectfully request answers to the questions we have outlined above. It is our abiding hope that the process for adopting an accurate, equitable, and culturally competent History-Social Science Framework remains fair, open, and transparent. To this end, we look forward to your responses to our questions by Friday, April 22nd.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

Samir Kalra, Esq.
Senior Director

cc:

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Nancy McTygue
Deborah Caplan, Olson Hagel & Fishburn