

Vermont Legislative Research Service

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Ethnic Studies in Primary and Secondary Schools

This is a report about creating an Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group in response to H.3, “Act Relating to Ethnic and Social Equity Standards for Public Schools” a bill proposed by Representatives Kevin Christie (Windsor 4-2), Brian Cina (Chittenden 6-4), Dylan Giambatista (Chittenden 8-2) and Diana Gonzalez (Chittenden 6-7) in January 2019. will reduce racial disparities in Vermont.

³ More specifically, the

and the collegiate level. Meanwhile, the Arizona House passed HB2281 in 2010 which restricted ethnic studies education in Arizona.

Ethnic Studies Overview

In the 1960s, students demanded that administrative offices at public universities reform their curriculum with regard to the histories and experiences of minorities. Students and activists of color called for “better access to higher education, changes in the curriculum, the recruitment of more professors of color, and the creation of ethnic studies programs.” From their origins at San Francisco State University, Berkeley and Santa Barbara campuses of the University of California, ethnic studies programs burgeoned throughout colleges and universities across the country. Today “there are more than 700 ethnic studies programs and departments in the United States,” most of which are concentrated in public colleges and universities. Ethnic studies programs originated out of the demands of student and community grassroots movements for changes in the academic power structure and white influence in both public and private universities, and these programs are now being attempted in primary and secondary schools in several states across the country.

History of Ethnic Studies in Vermont

Effective September 1984, the Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices mandated that

[n]o student in a public school or independent school shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity as the result of, or based upon, the student’s race, gender, color, creed, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, or any other reason set forth in state or federal anti-discrimination requirements¹¹

The Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (VCESE), a group of citizen advocates, plays an active role statewide in promoting more ethnic and social equality throughout Vermont schools. VCESE lobbied at Vermont Legislature in the 2018 session on H.794, the precursor to H.3, which was sponsored in order to create an advisory panel to help the Agency of Education adopt ethnic studies standards into statewide educational standards in

⁷ California State Assembly, Assembly Bill No. 2016: An act to add Section 51226.7 to the Education Code, relating to pupil instruction," Accessed February 7, 2019,

Vermont schools¹² Bill H.794 did not make it out of the Committee on Education. The State Board of Education opposed the bill for two reasons. First, H.794 would create separate entities to set education standards, which is a current responsibility of the State Board of Education. To maintain consistent policy, they did not wish to divide this duty. Second, the Board did not agree with the part of the bill that would impose curriculum and graduation requirements from Montpelier onto the local school districts, since curriculums are currently the responsibility of supervisory unions that meet standards the State Board of Education sets. The Board wanted to maintain the highly valued tradition of local control.¹³ Legislative sponsors introduced H.794 in the 2018-2019 Session with modifications to fix the issues the Board found with H.794

Benefits of Ethnic Studies in School Curriculums

Researchers have found that participation in ethnic studies courses offer academic advantages to students belonging to underrepresented groups. In a report from the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, researchers observed 1,405 students from San Francisco high schools and found that requiring underperforming students to take an ethnic studies class in high school “increased ninth grade student attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23.”¹⁴ The study determined that ethnic studies classes increase retention rates in public schools by offering struggling students more a more relevant and engaging education by using the culture and experiences of students as a basis for classroom learning.¹⁵ Additionally, the study found that ethnic studies classes promote closer student-teacher interactions.¹⁶ Similarly, a study conducted with indigenous Alaskan second grade students found that using modules specifically tailored to a student’s cultural background when teaching mathematics improved students’ performance.¹⁷ According to the researchers, “this study and others in the MCC series show that a culturally based curriculum has the potential to narrow the academic performance gap between indigenous students and their mainstream counterparts and can improve the performance of mainstream students, too.”¹⁸

¹² Vermont General Assembly, “H.794: An act relating to the adoption of ethnic studies standards into statewide educational standards and a policy on ethnic and social equity in schools by public schools and approved independent schools,” 2018,

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2018/Docs/BILL%20H794/H0794%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

¹³ Vermont State Board of Education, *Memorandum: In Reference to H.793 and H.794*. Barre, VT: Vermont State Board of Education, 2018, March 21, 2018, accessed February 16, 2019,

https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edstate-board-memo-to-houseand-senate-education-civics-and-ethnic-studies_0.pdf

¹⁴ Vermont General Assembly, “H.3.”

¹⁵ Thomas Dee and Emily Penner, “The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum,” Stanford Center for Policy Analysis (January 2016)

<https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp1601-v201601.pdf>

¹⁶ Dee, “Causal Effects.”

¹⁷ Dee, “Causal Effects.”

¹⁸ Ellen Eliason Kiskadee and Kerry Lipka,

Context and Abroad, Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices, and Historical and Contemporary Contributions³³ Each of the standards has four sub standards and teachers are encouraged to teach in a way that bridges them together. The full list of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Course Standards and sub standards can be seen in Table below. Specific areas of

Table1. Indiana Ethnic Studies Course Standards

<p>1: Cultural Self-Awareness</p>	<p>1.1: Students describe and defend the appropriate terminology including not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, cultural practices, bias, implicit bias, and critical consciousness 1.2: Students identify and analyze their social, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities and examine societal perceptions and behaviors related to their own identities 1.3: Students evaluate how society’s responses to different social identities lead to access and/or barriers for ethnic and racial groups in relation to various societal institutions, including but not limited to education, healthcare, government, and industry</p>
<p>2: Cultural Histories within the U.S. Context and Abroad</p>	<p>2.1: Students investigate the origins of various ethnic and racial groups, examining the historical influence of cultural, social, political, and socio-economic contexts on those groups 2.2: Students explain the reasons for various racial/ethnic groups’ presence in the U.S. (indigenous, voluntary, or forcible). 2.3: Students compare and contrast how circumstances of ethnic/racial groups affected their treatment and experiences (indigenous, voluntary, forcible) as a response to the dominant culture of the time. 2.4: Students examine history and the present to make predictions about what role the dominant culture plays in the loss of racial/ethnic culture and cultural identity.</p>
<p>3: Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices</p>	<p>3.1: Students identify and explore current traditions, customs, and norms of an ethnic or racial group(s) and how they have or are changing over time. 3.2: Students assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systematic oppressions for racial/ethnic groups related to accessing social, political, and economic opportunities.</p>
<p>4: Historical and Contemporary Contributions</p>	<p>4.1: Students examine historical and contemporary economic, intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group. 4.2: Students investigate how ethnic or racial group(s) and society address systematic oppressions through social movements, local, community, national, global advocacy, and individual champions.</p>

Source: Oklahoma State Oklahoma Administrative Code: 201:21-19-2, May 25, 07, Accessed February 19, 2019, <http://okrules.elaws.us/oac/210:2019-2>.

Oklahoma

On January 19, 2019, the Oklahoma Administrative Code was updated in Section 210:21-19-2 of the Professional Development Program requiring racial and ethnic education to “function effectively with all students in a culturally diverse society.” This amendment includes requiring teachers to

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constitution. In order to enact the IEFA, in 2005 the State Legislature “appropriated more than \$7 million to local school districts to help with their implementation efforts and also allotted more than \$3 million to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) as state funding in support of IEFA.⁴¹ Moreover, “OPI designated part of its special funding for competitive grant awards of \$25,000 to \$50,000 to design and test innovative Indian education implementation approaches.⁴²

Researcher at the University of Montana assessed American Indian education and open mindedness among teachers and students between the kindergarten and grade level at Lewis and Clark (L & C) School, one of the schools given a \$50,000 grant by the OPI to develop and implement an IEFA program. To fulfill the goals of the school IEFA program, over twenty teachers at L & C integrated perspectives of the Salish and Pend d’Oreille, the two closest Native American communities, into all subject areas. Under the L & C School’s place based approach, “students reached beyond the classroom to experience the place where Indigenous cultures and histories reside and connected face to face with members of neighboring American Indian communities who are so close yet often so distant.”⁴³ The report found “impressive gains in L & C students’ knowledge of the place and the development of positive attitudes toward interacting with American Indians that carry the potential to improve

To avoid losing state funding, the Tucson school board voted to dismantle the ethnic studies classes in January 2012. Later, students and parents in the Tucson Unified School District filed a lawsuit to overturn the state's restrictions, accusing Arizona officials of passing and implementing the law with the goal of discriminating against Hispanics. The lawsuit argued that the statute violates the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment guarantee to equal protection before the law and students' First Amendment right to receive information freely. In 2017, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit struck down a portion of the law banning programs designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group. In the ruling, Senior Judge A. Wallace Tashima said, "both enactment and enforcement were motivated by racial animus."⁴⁸

Conclusion

As multiple state legislatures pass requirements for ethnic studies in school curriculums, including Oregon, California, Indiana, Oklahoma, and Montana, there is significant discussion about the viability and benefits of applying such standards in other states. Researchers have found ethnic studies curriculums increase school attendance, GPAs, and graduation rates by creating a more relevant and engaging classroom environment for students of various backgrounds.

This report was completed on March 25, 2019, by Morgan Dreibelbis, Theo Cutler, and Alex Reese, under the supervision of VLRS Research Assistant Emily Klofft and VLRS Director, Professor Anthony "Jack" Gierzynski in response to a request from Representative Conlon.

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Disclaimer: The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.

⁴⁸ Julie Depenbrock "Federal Judge Finds Racism Behind Arizona Law Banning Ethnic Studies" NPR, August 23, 2017, Accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/22/545402866/federal-judge-finds-racism-behind-arizona-law-banning-ethnic-studies>