



The Washington State  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION**

## **An Ethnic Studies Concept Paper**

*Prepared by: Jasmin Patrón-Vargas, Policy Analyst for the State Board of Education*

**Contents**

**An Ethnic Studies Concept Paper** ..... 1

Executive Summary ..... 4

The Landscape of K-12 Ethnic Studies in the U.S. .... 7

The Latest on Ethnic Studies in Washington State..... 8

Ethnic Studies: An Overview ..... 11

Research on the Effects of Ethnic Studies ..... 13

Key Themes from Listening Sessions ..... 21

Purpose of Ethnic Studies..... 22

Goals of Ethnic Studies ..... 23

Implementation ..... 28

Challenges Moving Forward..... 29

Conclusion and Recommendations..... 30

Resources ..... 32

References..... 32

## **Acknowledgments**

This paper was prepared through engagement with educators, students, families, and Washington residents. We are incredibly grateful to the Washington State community for their contributions and perspectives on implementing a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.

## Executive Summary

In March 2021, the State Board of Education (SBE) in Washington adopted a [resolution](#) to establish a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement. The resolution responds to students across the state who have expressed a desire for courses devoted to exploring Ethnic Studies. Broadly, Ethnic Studies is the “interdisciplinary and comparative study of the social, cultural, political, and economic experiences of ethno-racial groups.” (Washington Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, 2021, p. 6). In October 2021, the SBE held listening sessions with diverse stakeholders, including Washington students, educators, families, and community members. The purpose of these sessions was to learn more about their perceptions of and hopes for a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement. The SBE particularly focused on three topics:

- The purpose of Ethnic Studies
- Goals of Ethnic Studies
- Considerations for implementation

In November 2021, State Board staff provided a summary report of preliminary findings from the listening sessions. This paper builds on the preliminary findings identified in November and the commentary we received via email.

We hope this paper generates fruitful conversations and ideas around a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement in Washington. It is important to note that while this paper outlines significant themes for an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement, it is only the first step in developing such a requirement. In alignment with Ethnic Studies principles and advocates, we believe that for meaningful Ethnic Studies to exist, it must be developed with the members it seeks to serve. As such, we look forward to continuing to build partnerships and trust with students, families, educators, and community partners.

## Paper Organization

The first section of the paper reviews the current national context of the K-12 Ethnic Studies Movement, with a particular focus on the latest trends in Washington. We also

**Ethnic Studies is “an interdisciplinary and comparative study of the social, cultural, political, and economic experiences of ethno-racial groups...”**

**(Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee)**

provide an overview of the field of Ethnic Studies, including its history and research on the effects of Ethnic Studies. In the second section, we highlight the listening sessions' themes. The third section discusses ongoing challenges to consider as we work ahead. We conclude by sharing future recommendations.

## **Summary of Key Themes**

Through our engagement with community members, including students, parents, educators, and Washington State residents, we gathered information about what they would like to see in a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement. The findings in this paper highlight common trends and patterns that emerged from the feedback we received. Below is a summary of outstanding themes from the listening sessions and commentary:

- Purpose – Ethnic Studies offers an opportunity to go beyond the status quo, allowing historically excluded narratives to be at the center of the curriculum.
- Goals – Ethnic Studies aims to:
  - Promote self-empowerment
  - Foster a sense of community
  - Develop well-informed citizens
  - Prepare socially responsible leaders
- Implementation – Ethnic Studies should be implemented as a graduation requirement, requiring students to complete at least one course (in any subject area) designed and delivered through an Ethnic Studies lens.

## **Summary of Challenges Moving Forward**

1. **Inclusion of all Perspectives** – Some participants expressed concerns about whose perspectives will be included in Ethnic Studies. For example, a student commented that it will be important for Ethnic Studies to recognize the narratives of Jewish people, who often face anti-Semitism.
2. **Teacher Support** – Many educators shared that they are worried about resistance from stakeholders that oppose Ethnic Studies. Others expressed concerns about teachers' limited training in Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy.
3. **Added Student Pressure** – Parents are concerned that an Ethnic Studies requirement will place more stress on students.
4. **Compromising Ethnic Studies Mission and Values** – Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline can be broadly interpreted, creating misconceptions and ill-defined definitions of the field. For this reason, Ethnic Studies proponents are worried that the original mission and values of Ethnic Studies are at risk of being misconstrued.

5. **Intentional Engagement with Tribal Nations** – Some Tribal nations have expressed concerns about their involvement with Ethnic Studies initiatives, as Indigenous peoples are more than just members of an ethnic group. They have sovereign rights.
6. **Proposed Reforms Do Not Go Far Enough** – While students have expressed excitement about a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement, some have emphasized the importance of ongoing engagement as an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement is only one step in meeting their needs.

## Summary of Recommendations

Based on the feedback we received from Washington State residents, we provide the following recommendations. Our recommendations borrow from and align with several Ethnic Studies initiatives across the nation, including the [Washington State Ethnic Studies Framework](#), the [California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#), and the [Rethinking Ethnic Studies](#) resource book.

1. **Graduation Requirement** – Continue to support the creation of an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement within the existing credit framework. This means developing a policy that would require students to complete at least one course (in any subject area) that is designed and delivered through an Ethnic Studies lens.
2. **Youth Leadership and Voice** – Establish and maintain a formal relationship with student-led organizations to ensure that student voice, input, and considerations are part of the development of a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.
3. **Community Engagement** – Strengthen and expand initiatives on community engagement and partnerships to ensure communities are engaged in the process, sharing knowledge and expertise, contributing to local decision-making efforts, and building capacity.
4. **Tribal Partnerships** – Collaborate with Washington Native American Tribes and Tribal organizations in developing Ethnic Studies programs.
5. **Educational Collaboration** – Continue collaboration efforts between state agencies and educational partners to advance Ethnic Studies and realize its mission of providing a quality education that celebrates the humanity of all students.
6. **Higher Education** – Explore and pursue relationships with higher education experts in the field of Ethnic Studies.
7. **Strategic Plan** – Develop a comprehensive strategic plan for implementation, including an initial pilot that will enable the state to gather data about what works and doesn't work about the new requirement.

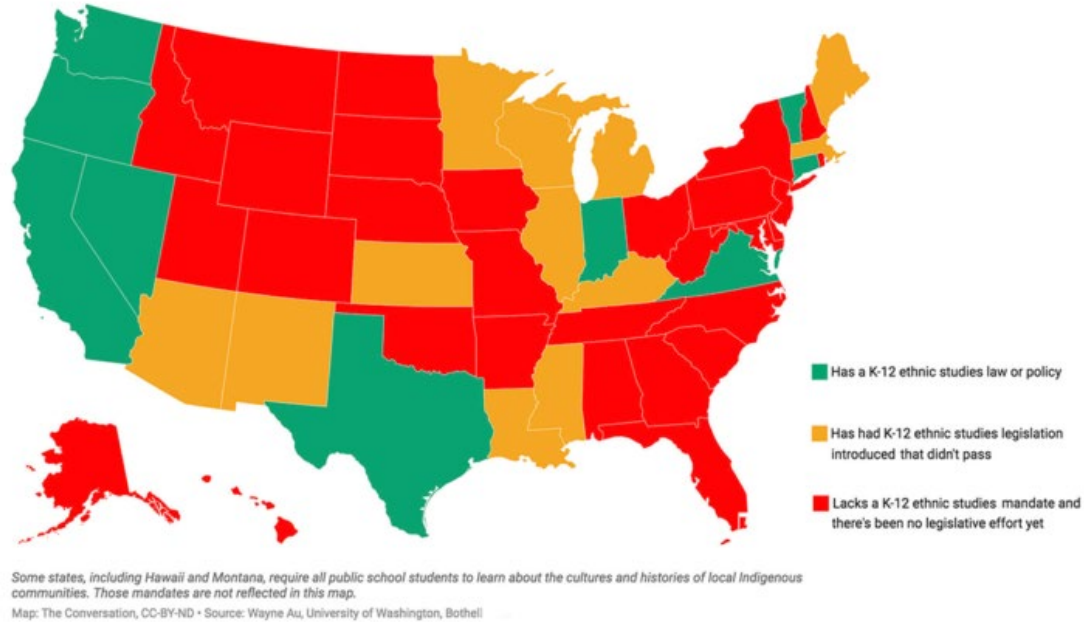
8. **Funding** – Develop a funding model that includes allocating funding for a statewide Ethnic Studies mandate to ensure its long-term sustainability and strategic growth.
9. **Professional Development** – Increase investments in high-quality, sustained professional development opportunities for all educators to ensure they understand Ethnic Studies pedagogy and content.
10. **Research** – Invest in ongoing research and inquiry around implementation challenges and successes in districts across Washington State, led by researchers that are knowledgeable in Ethnic Studies frameworks.

## The Landscape of K-12 Ethnic Studies in the U.S.

In 2010, Arizona's Republican Governor Jan Brewer signed [House Bill 2281](#) (HB 2281), banning Mexican American/Raza Studies (MARS) in Tucson. According to state officials, the program "promoted the overthrow of the U.S. government" (Muñoz, 2018). What state officials did not anticipate is that the banning of MARS would incite a nationwide movement for humanizing and anti-racist learning (see map below). Over the last decade, more than nine states in the U.S. have introduced statewide initiatives that establish some form of K-12 Ethnic Studies (Kwon, 2021). These states include [California](#), [Connecticut](#), [Indiana](#), [Nevada](#), [Oregon](#), [Texas](#), [Vermont](#), [Virginia](#), and [Washington](#). According to Ethnic Studies proponents, Ethnic Studies teaches:

More than just history and racial justice. It's a framework that allows participants from multiple cultures to share their perspectives, achievements, traditions and experiences. It is designed to help eradicate fear, structural racism, and social inequities by promoting knowledge and understanding (Smith, 2021, para. 2).

Before statewide legislation, however, many school districts adopted Ethnic Studies courses or graduation requirements. In 2014, for instance, [El Rancho Unified School District](#) became the first school district in California to pass an Ethnic Studies high school graduation requirement. Shortly after, two large districts—[Los Angeles Unified School District](#) and [San Francisco Unified School District](#)—also adopted a resolution to make Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement. A year later, in 2015, [Chicago Public Schools](#) introduced districtwide Latinx and Latin American Studies curricula. Other districts that have implemented graduation requirements or courses include [Austin Public Schools](#), [Bridgeport Public Schools](#), [Portland Public Schools](#), [Providence Public Schools](#), [Oakland Unified School District](#), [Sacramento City Unified School District](#), [San Diego Unified School District](#), the [School District of Philadelphia](#), and [Seattle Public Schools](#).



Map: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND

Source: Wayne Au, University of Washington, Bothell

## The Latest on Ethnic Studies in Washington State

In 2018, the Washington State Legislature passed [Substitute Senate Bill 5023](#), requiring the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to establish an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee (ESAC), identify resources and materials for teaching Ethnic Studies in grades 7–12, and periodically update state learning standards to incorporate best practices in Ethnic Studies. In 2019, the Legislature passed [Senate Bill 6066](#), expanding the scope of work to include all grades K–12. Following the legislation, OSPI created the ESAC in 2019, composed of 45 members. Their responsibilities included identifying and making available Ethnic Studies materials and resources and creating a framework to support the teaching of Ethnic Studies in grades K–12. The Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee published the [Washington State Ethnic Studies Framework](#) in October 2021. The framework seeks to support educators and administrators implementing Ethnic Studies. In addition, ESAC developed the [Ethnic Studies Open Educational Resources \(OER\)](#), an online portal for districts choosing to implement Ethnic Studies in K–12.

In line with these goals, in March of 2021, the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a [resolution](#) of intent to establish a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement within the existing credit framework. The resolution responds to students across the state who have expressed a desire for courses devoted to exploring Ethnic



Studies. More precisely, in 2020, Washington State students at the [Modern Day Racism in Education](#)<sup>1</sup> panel spoke on the necessity of Ethnic Studies. According to student testimonies, Ethnic Studies will provide students with a more well-rounded view of the world, enabling students to contribute to a growing multidimensional society. In pursuit of this goal, the SBE held listening sessions in October 2021 with various stakeholders to learn more about their perceptions of a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement. This paper focuses on the feedback the SBE received in the listening sessions.

Organizations and collectives have also been established at the grassroots level to support Ethnic Studies statewide implementation. In 2019, for instance, [Washington Ethnic Studies Now](#) (WAESN), a non-profit organization, was created. The organization aims to advance anti-racist education and Ethnic Studies in Washington State. In 2021, WAESN held its third annual assembly, a one-day event that brought together various stakeholders from Washington State “to build collective capacity, and let people know where they can plug into existing efforts, or how they can start their own efforts” (McKenna, 2021). WAESN has also provided staff and board members from the SBE with professional learning regarding the foundations of Ethnic Studies and participated on the WA Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee that developed the framework.

Altogether, efforts to adopt Ethnic Studies come at a critical time. Across the nation, young people are calling for an education that challenges racism and enables them to understand themselves, their histories, and the ongoing battles for civil rights, equity, and justice. Furthermore, the global reality gives new prominence to preparing students to become active global citizens. The 2020 U.S. Census shows that Washington has a racial composition of 61.6% White, 18.7% Hispanic, 12.4% Black, 6% Asian, 1.1% Native American, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 8.4% some other race alone, and 10.2% Multiracial. By 2040<sup>2</sup>, however, it is expected that the Washington population will grow by 2 million people, leading to unprecedented ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity.

The demographic shift is also evident in school enrollments. Since 2007, Washington public schools have seen significant changes in their enrollments by race/ethnicity. According to the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.), since 2012, Washington public schools have seen a decrease in the number and percentage of

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<sup>1</sup> In August 2020, the State Board of Education hosted a student panel entitled, “Modern Day Racism in Education.” The goal of the panel was to learn from students’ educational experiences, so that policy actions can be informed by student voice. Over 200 people registered to listen to the experiences of students Mineva Misiata (Auburn Riverside High School), AJ Lopez (Bainbridge High School), Shreya Mehta (Hanford High School), Jennifer Tran (Foster High School), Shafaq Buttar (Foster High School), Ally Sutherland (Woodinville High School), Alicia Ing (recent graduate, Renton High School), and Margarita Amezcua (Auburn Riverside High School).

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, *Forecast of the State Population, November 2016 Forecast 2017* [https://www.ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/pop/stfc/stfc\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/pop/stfc/stfc_2016.pdf)

White students and an increase in Asian, Latino, and multiracial students. In the 2021-2022 school year, Washington's student population is 50.0 percent Black, Indigenous, and (Other) People of Color (BIPOC)<sup>3</sup>. In the 2021–2022 school year, the student racial composition in Washington public PreK-12 schools was 50.0% White, 25.2% Hispanic, 4.6% Black, 8.5% Asian, 1.3% Native American, 1.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 9.2% Multiracial (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.).

In addition to race/ethnicity, other K-12 demographic data demands attention. According to the 2021-22 Washington State Report Card:

- 45.7% of K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals
- 14.3% of students participate in Special Education Programs
- 12.4% are considered transitional bilingual education participants
- 3.9% are eligible for Section 504 services for students with disabilities
- 4,122 students are actively enrolled in foster care programs

As Washington's demographics continue to shift toward a multilingual and multicultural society, it will be essential to consider how to meet the needs of a pluralistic population. Ethnic Studies provides an excellent opportunity to support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)<sup>4</sup> while preparing the growing diverse population in Washington. In Washington, demographic data continues to shift, leaving the state with unprecedented ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity.

## Summary

As mentioned earlier, efforts to implement Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools have gained momentum over the past decade. Across the country, at least nine states have passed legislation to implement some form of Ethnic Studies in K-12 public schools. In other states, school districts have implemented Ethnic Studies at the district level. In Washington, efforts have also emerged to implement Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools. According to Washington students, Ethnic Studies is necessary as it will allow students to feel seen in the curriculum, empowering their sense of self and belonging in schools. Furthermore, Washington students argue that Ethnic Studies will enable them to learn about the different perspectives of their peers, further increasing their understanding of the multiethnic society in which we live.

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<sup>3</sup> Per the Race and Ethnicity Student Data Task Force Guidance on race and ethnicity categories as well as subracial and sub-ethnic categories

<sup>4</sup> A term that stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color that underscores the different experiences of historically marginalized people, including Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

## Ethnic Studies: An Overview

Ethnic Studies is “an interdisciplinary and comparative study of the social, cultural, political, and economic experiences of ethno-racial groups” (Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, 2021, p. 6). Although Ethnic Studies emerged from a demand by Asian/Asian American, Black, Latinx, and Native American students for relevant education, it is more than the inclusion of communities of color who “too had heroes and great civilizations” (Okiihiro, 2016, p. 150). Ethnic Studies considers the ways systems of power are interconnected and ultimately shape the world we live in. In this way, Ethnic Studies is not only for Black, Indigenous, and students of color but for all students.

### History of Ethnic Studies

The ideological origins of Ethnic Studies can be traced back to the early 1900s. Several scholars of color argued that the histories, perspectives, and contributions of marginalized peoples—African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Chicana/Latina, and Native Americans—should be included in traditional disciplines (Okiihiro, 2011; Sleeter, 2011). These scholars included W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Mary McLeod Bethune, Grace Lee Boggs, Rodolfo Acuña, Carter G. Woodson, Carlos Bulosan, Vine Deloria Jr., and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others.

Although the ideological roots of Ethnic Studies can be linked to the works of the above-mentioned scholars of color in the early 1900s, the fight for Ethnic Studies as an official academic field began in 1968. Inspired by the intellectual work of these scholars, along with the sociopolitical climate of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. and abroad, a coalition of students of color went on a five-month strike in 1968 at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University, SFSU). One of the fundamental events that led to the strike emerged from the firing of George Mason Murray, an English instructor at SFSU. Murray was an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War and the minister of education for the [Black Panther Party](#). On November 1, 1968, George Mason Murray was fired from SFSU. Five days after the firing of Murray, the Third World Liberation Front<sup>5</sup>, a coalition of students from different organizations at San Francisco State University, joined together to organize and express their discord with the firing of Murray and other injustices. Together, they drafted [15 demands](#), including creating a [school of Third World studies](#), and a Black studies degree and department (Umemoto, 1989). After a

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<sup>5</sup> The Third World Liberation Front was a coalition of students from different organizations, including the campus’ Black Student Union, Latin American Student Organization (LASO), the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the Mexican American Student Confederation, the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), La Raza, the Native American Students Organization, and Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at San Francisco State University.

hard-fought battle, the College of Ethnic Studies was established at San Francisco State on March 20, 1969, making it the first of its kind in the country.

During the same period, similar actions were taking place across other colleges and K-12 schools in the U.S. In the spring of 1968, the Afro-American Student Union (AASU) at the University of California at Berkeley proposed a Black Studies program (California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, 2021). The AASU was soon joined by other organizations on campus, such as the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC), the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), and the Native American Student Union (NASU). Together, they formed the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) chapter at the University of California, Berkeley. Similar to the TWLF at SFSU, they proposed the creation of the Third World College, comprised of four autonomous units: Asian American Studies, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, and Native American Studies. On March 7, 1969, the first Ethnic Studies entity at UC Berkeley was created.

By 1993, over 700 Ethnic Studies programs existed in the U.S. (Hu-DeHart, 1993). This included K-12 programs, such as Berkeley High in California, one of the first high schools in the nation to require Ethnic Studies (Markovich, 2021).

In 1998, the Mexican American Raza Studies (MARS) program was created in Tucson with the premise that the experiences, history, literature, and art of Chicanos were a necessary and valid area for rigorous academic exploration (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Many students of Mexican descent reacted positively to this development. In a study that investigated the influence of MARS, Cabrera and colleagues (2014) found that Chicano students graduated at higher rates and performed significantly better on state exams than in previous years. Despite these positive findings, in 2010, Arizona Governor, Jan Brewer, [banned Mexican American Raza Studies](#) in Tucson. According to state officials Tom Horne and John Huppenthal, the program promoted ethnic division and hatred towards the U.S. government. In 2017, Judge A. Wallace Tashima ruled [the ban on MARS unconstitutional](#). According to the judge's ruling, the ban was racially motivated, violating the constitutional rights of Mexican American students. To date, the MARS program is considered the only program in the nation to have a full-fledged Ethnic Studies program.

Today, 50 years later, Ethnic Studies programs continue to offer ways of analyzing racial and ethnic concerns constructively. Still, Ethnic Studies continues to be met with opposition. According to critics, Ethnic Studies promotes "cultural separatism" and "indoctrinates" students with anti-American beliefs (Schlesinger, 1990, 1998). Other common misconceptions include the following (Zavala et al., 2019):

1. "We already do Ethnic Studies; we have culturally responsive teaching."

2. "Ethnic Studies is simply a version of social studies/history."
3. "Ethnic Studies only focus on race."
4. "Ethnic Studies is only for students of color."
5. "Ethnic Studies is a remediation program for at-risk youth."
6. "If adopted as a graduation requirement, students may not want Ethnic Studies."
7. "Ethnic Studies courses are successful because of teacher efficacy rather than the curriculum."
8. "Ethnic Studies is most effective at the high school and college level."
9. "College professors of Ethnic Studies are most qualified to teach Ethnic Studies courses."
10. "Ethnic Studies classes might engage students, but I don't see how they address real learning."

As the SBE continues to work toward a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement, we wish to dispel myths about Ethnic Studies by engaging different stakeholders in dialogue that provides a more profound understanding of what Ethnic Studies is and what it offers. For more information on what Ethnic Studies *is*, read Zavala et al. (2019) chapter in *Rethinking Ethnic Studies*.

## **Research on the Effects of Ethnic Studies**

This section reviews the social and academic impact of Ethnic Studies on students in pre-K through higher education. This section is organized into three main subsections. The first subsection highlights the effects of Ethnic Studies on the social development of Black, Indigenous, and students of color or (BIPOC) students. The second subsection reviews research on the impact of Ethnic Studies on BIPOC students' academic performance. The third subsection reviews research on the effects of Ethnic Studies on White students.

### ***The Social Impact of Ethnic Studies Programs for Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color***

One of the main strands of research on the impact of Ethnic Studies has focused on students' sense of self (Belgrave et al., 2000; Gaxiola Serrano et al., 2019; Halagao, 2010; Lewis et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2008; Vasquez, 2005). Sense of self describes an awareness of the self, often influenced by the extent to which an individual feels accepted and supported by members of a racial/ethnic group (Hunter et al., 2019). In particular, research has investigated the effects of Ethnic Studies on BIPOC students' racial identity, sense of belonging, and attitudes toward learning.

One of the ways Ethnic Studies impacts the racial identity of BIPOC students is by immersing students in learning that reflects their cultural practices, traditions, and history. Racial identity refers to "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1995, p. 3). For example, in a quantitative study, Belgrave et al. (2000) studied the impact of a four-month-long Afrocentric extracurricular program for middle school Black girls. Students learned about African and African American culture, such as the Rites of Separation Ceremony, a traditional ritual in African culture. The findings demonstrate that students in the intervention group scored significantly higher in measures of racial identity, self-concept, and Africentric values than students in the control group. This is important as an established line of research has demonstrated that positive feelings about the self are linked to positive behaviors (e.g., better school performance) (Henly, 1993; Whaley, 1993).

Similarly, Thomas et al. (2008) also found a positive link between Ethnic Studies and Black students' racial identity development. Based on a 10-week school-based program for Black high school girls, the authors tested the program's effectiveness using a control group and a non-control group. As part of the program, students learned about African American history and contemporary culture, weaving in African cultural values, Freire's critical consciousness<sup>6</sup>, and holistic learning. Similar to the previous study, the findings demonstrate that participants in the program scored higher in measures of racial identity than participants from the control group. Altogether, the studies underscore the importance of a curriculum that affirms students' ethnic and racial identity.

Other research has focused on the impact of Ethnic Studies and students' sense of belonging in academic spaces and beyond (De los Ríos, 2013; Gonzalez, 2002; Halagao, 2004; Marrun, 2018; Vasquez, 2005). In a qualitative study, for example, Halagao (2004) examined the impact of the Pinoy Teach curriculum on six Filipinx<sup>7</sup> American college students. The curriculum, which Halagao co-developed, focused on Philippine and Filipino American history and culture. The author reports that students gained a more profound sense of community, confidence, and empowerment. For example, by the end of the course, several participants expressed how the Pinoy Teach curriculum disrupted stereotypes they had about other Filipinx as Debbie, one of the participants, said, "there's definitely camaraderie because we're all experiencing the same thing and we're

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<sup>6</sup> Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who is most known for his ideas around critical pedagogy and critical consciousness. Critical consciousness refers to the ability, through understanding one's social and political condition, to act and change one's condition.

<sup>7</sup> Filipinx serves as an identity marker for people with ancestry in the Philippines. Instead of using Filipina or Filipino, the "x" renders the term gender neutral.

all Filipino. I felt like there was a lot of support, and for a lot of us, it was our first maybe real exposure to our own history so we didn't feel like we were in the dark by ourselves" (p. 471). To that end, not only do students gain an individual awareness of their racial identity when the curriculum affirms their culture, but so does it influence their collective sense of belonging in a racial/ethnic group.

Other research indicates that when students share a sense of belonging in school settings and their communities, they feel more motivated to engage in community social change (Lewis et al., 2012; Tyson, 2002). In an experimental study of a one-semester African American curriculum for Black eighth-graders, Lewis et al. (2012) reported that youth in the experimental curriculum scored higher than those in the control groups in metrics of school connectedness, motivation to achieve, and social change involvement. The authors credit the sustained curricular focus on African American history and culture. In other words, when culturally relevant Ethnic Studies teaching is sustained in the classroom, students are more likely to feel affirmed and validated in the classroom, leading to greater levels of belonging and motivation for social change. Overall, these studies show that BIPOC students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging in school settings and their community when they participate in an Ethnic Studies course.

Additionally, several research studies have focused on the benefits of Ethnic Studies on students' attitudes toward academic learning (Bean et al., 1999; Copenhaver, 2001; Duncan, 2012; Matthews & Smith, 1994; Rickford, 2001). Matthews and Smith (1994) conducted an experimental study investigating the impact of Native American science materials on fourth through eighth graders in nine schools. The 10-week intervention included biographies of Native Americans using science and other activities related to Native nations. The results show that the experimental group expressed a more positive attitude toward science in the post-test. In this sense, Ethnic Studies supports students' positive perceptions of subjects that have historically excluded BIPOC students.

Similarly, other studies point to an increase in students' attitudes when students' prior knowledge is valued. In an analysis of Black students' responses to reading *Malcolm X: A Fire*, Copenhaver (2001) found that students showed high levels of engagement. For example, students shared knowledge about African American media, civil rights leaders, and everyday racial issues to follow the plot, make connections, and interpret the story. The results suggest that students not only engage through a shared sense of cultural texts but also by making connections to their experiences. To that end, for Ethnic Studies to effectively influence student engagement, it must include culturally relevant curricula and educators that honor student knowledge.

In brief, incorporating Ethnic Studies into the school curriculum positively impacts the social development of BIPOC students. These outcomes include a greater sense of racial identity, belonging in academic spaces and beyond, and positive perceptions of learning through academic engagement. Noteworthy elements of these findings include the importance of culturally relevant texts and pedagogy, and honoring students' funds of knowledge<sup>8</sup>.

### ***The Academic Impact of Ethnic Studies Programs for Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color***

In addition to the social impact of Ethnic Studies, research supporting the value of Ethnic Studies demonstrates that BIPOC youth benefit academically from Ethnic Studies courses and programs. Student performance reflects information about the academic progress of a student, including the grade point average (GPA), high school graduation rate, and standardized test scores (Department of Education, n.d.). Collectively, researchers emphasize the positive educational outcomes that these courses can have on state standardized test scores (Cabrera et al., 2014; Lipka et al., 2005; McCarty, 1993; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Romero et al., 2009), and other measures of students performance including, school completion (Cammarota, 2007; Dee & Penner, 2017; Green-Gibson & Collett, 2014) and comprehension skills (Kisker et al., 2012; Rickford, 2001; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Tyson, 2002).

Research investigating the academic impact of Ethnic Studies curricula shows an increase in students' state standardized test scores (Cabrera et al., 2014; Likpa et al., 2005; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; McCarty, 1993; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Research on Mexican-origin students, for example, has shown that Ethnic Studies courses impact students' test scores. Perhaps the most well-known research involving an Ethnic Studies program is Cabrera et al. (2014) study of the Mexican American Raza Studies (MARS) program in Tucson, Arizona. Guided by a Critically Compassionate Intellectualism (CCI) model,<sup>9</sup> which positions students as holders of knowledge, the authors found that Mexican-origin high school students enrolled in the program outperformed students who were not enrolled in the program on state exams in reading, math, and writing.

Other research expands the conversation by indicating that Native students are more likely to excel academically when the curriculum addresses culture, language, and tribal

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<sup>8</sup> Funds of knowledge are the knowledge and expertise that students and their family members have because of their roles in their families, communities, and culture (Moll et al., 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Created by Julio Cammarota and Augustine Romero, Critically Compassionate Intellectualism is an educational model that incorporates the educational trilogy of critical pedagogy (Freire et al., 2018), authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999), and a social justice centered curriculum (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).



sovereignty. McCarty and Lee (2014) report a case study of the Native American Community Academy's (NACA) impact on middle and high school students in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school's overall vision is to provide educational opportunities that strengthen Native students' cultural identities and cultural knowledge. The researchers report that eighth graders' test scores in 2011-2012 increased significantly over the previous year by 21% in math, 20% in reading, and 9% in writing. Overall, the findings provide compelling evidence about the benefits of Ethnic Studies courses for students of color and their improved test scores. It can be argued that a persistent common feature of these positive results is that they emerge from the use of culturally relevant curricula.

Another small body of studies points to the positive impact of an Ethnic Studies curriculum on students' school completion rates, specifically attendance (Dee & Penner, 2016), yearly progress (Green-Gibson & Collett, 2014), and graduation rates (Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Dee & Penner, 2016). An increase in student attendance has been particularly prevalent in high school studies. Dee and Penner (2016) examined the effects of an Ethnic Studies high school course on 1405 students in San Francisco, California. They reported that the Ethnic Studies course had "large positive effects on each of [the] student outcomes" (p. 3). Specifically, the course increased student attendance by 21 percentage points. Other investigations of Ethnic Studies have used the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report to explore the impact of an African-centered curriculum on middle schoolers. The AYP is a measure used to determine whether schools are successfully educating their students and whether students are showing growth in their learning. In a study of Black middle school students in Chicago, Green-Gibson and Collett (2014) found that students enrolled in a school with an African-centered curriculum performed better than students in a school that did not infuse African culture into their curriculum.

Moreover, research on the impact of Ethnic Studies indicates that when students take Ethnic Studies courses, they are more likely to graduate from high school. Using student-level administrative data from Tucson Unified School District, Cabrera and colleagues (2014) report findings from three cohorts enrolled in the MARS program (N=26, 022). The results show that taking more than one MARS course "significantly increased the probability of graduation" (p. 23). This trend was particularly evident for students considered "low performing" (p. 16). This is significant as research shows that students of color are disproportionately pushed out of schools (Morris, 2016; Rios, 2011). Ethnic Studies courses, in this way, provide many benefits for BIPOC students, one of them being school completion.

A small number of qualitative studies have explored the impact of Ethnic Studies on BIPOC students' comprehension skills (Kisker et al., 2012; Rickford, 2001; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Tyson, 2002). Specifically, when BIPOC youth engage in literature that connects to their lived experiences, they develop higher-order thinking skills. For example, Rickford (2001) explored the impact of culturally relevant texts on 25 African American middle school students. In assessing their comprehension, Rickford found that the students excelled in higher-order thinking. The author suggests that students' ability to comprehend texts is related to their familiarity with culturally relevant themes, such as African American vernacular.

Furthermore, when students are pushed to think complexly about social, political, and economic issues, which is a central learning goal of Ethnic Studies, they develop better critical thinking skills (Tyson, 2002). Tyson (2002) examined how students responded to adolescent novels about social issues in a middle school study. Using multiethnic novels as part of integrated social studies and English Language Arts block, students developed an understanding of the complexities of social action and an ability to use text to derive meaning. For example, students designed and redeveloped their definitions of social action and reacted to their environments by engaging with multiethnic novels. Ethnic Studies courses provide students with the academic skillset to navigate academic assignments.

In contrast to the literature reviewed above, one study did not find a positive link between academic performance and Ethnic Studies courses. Ginwright (2000) examined the effects of an urban high school initiative for Black low-income youth. Based on several academic indicators, including enrollment, GPA, dropout rate, suspension rate, number of graduates, and higher education enrollment numbers, Ginwright found that these indicators stayed the same or worsened over the five years of the initiative. The author argues that students likely rejected the reform due to conflicting worldviews between the students in the program and the curriculum specialist. On the one hand, the middle-class Black educators who created the curriculum drew on Egypt's African and African American knowledge systems. On the other hand, the central concerns of the low-income Black youth in the program dealt with housing, employment, health care, and poverty. The author concluded that while cultural identity is essential, relevancy is crucial. To that end, while this study did not find any significant improvement in school performance among students of color, it confirms the importance of considering students' experiences and their local communities when designing an Ethnic Studies initiative.

Overall, all but one study reviewed found that Ethnic Studies curriculum tremendously impacts the academic and social achievements of Black, Indigenous and students of

color. A significant factor contributing to students' success is culturally relevant texts and pedagogy. In other words, the more students see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum, the more likely they are to be engaged in school, leading to tremendous educational success. Moreover, an equally important component in the success of Ethnic Studies involves teachers' critical pedagogical practices. Students develop strong comprehension skills and a positive sense of belonging by exploring and analyzing social issues in a culturally relevant manner.

### ***The Benefits of Ethnic Studies for White Students***

Thus far, most studies on the effectiveness of Ethnic Studies have shown a positive impact on Black, Indigenous, and students of color. However, the question remains about what impact Ethnic Studies programs have on White students. This section reviews the research on the impact of Ethnic Studies on White students. Although this research is still developing, a sizable amount of related research in higher education and multicultural education has documented significant improvements in White students' racial attitudes towards People of Color. Recent studies at the high school level have also begun reporting exciting findings related to White students' self-perceptions as racialized people.

A considerable amount of research in higher education has documented the impact of diversity courses, including Ethnic Studies, on students' degree of racial bias (Bowman, 2010; Denson, 2009; Gurin et al., 2003; Lopez, 2004). Engberg (2004), for example, reviewed 73 studies that investigated the impact of diversity courses, workshops, and peer-facilitated intervention on college students. The results demonstrated that at least 52 of these studies reported a positive impact of diversity coursework on reducing students' biases. The effect of these courses was significantly more vital when a combination of diverse content and cross-group interaction occurred.

In a similar study, Okoye-Johnson (2011) explored the effects of a multicultural curriculum versus a traditional curriculum on the racial attitudes of pre-K–12 students. Using a statistical meta-analysis of 30 studies, the results show that at least 21 of these studies reported more positive changes in White students' racial attitudes than did exposure to traditional instruction (p.1263). Although Ethnic Studies and multiculturalism are not synonymous, they share similar attributes related to the study of race and ethnicity. Therefore, the findings from this study showcase the benefits of a curriculum that focuses on race and ethnicity.

More recent work has also documented the effects of Ethnic Studies on White students' self-perceptions. In a three-year longitudinal ethnographic study, San Pedro (2018)

examined a White student's experience in a high school Ethnic Studies course that focused on Native American literature. The author found that the course helped the White student reconceptualize her racial identity and knowledge about other groups. Ultimately, San Pedro argued that Ethnic Studies not only supports BIPOC students but also aids in "the deconstruction of invisibility, socialization and privileging of Whiteness that works to maintain social and cultural order" (p.1206).

## **Summary**

In summary, research shows that Ethnic Studies positively impacts students from varied backgrounds, in K-12 educational environments as well as higher education settings. Based on the research, Ethnic Studies benefits students in the following ways:

- Positive racial/ethnic identity
- Greater sense of belonging in and out of school settings
- More likely to contribute to positive social change
- Higher levels of awareness about race and racism
- Increased rates of graduation, attendance, standardized test scores, and comprehension skills

## Key Themes from Listening Sessions

During the month of October 2021, the SBE held [four listening sessions](#) with various stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the listening sessions was to learn from Washington residents about what they would like to see in an Ethnic Studies requirement. In order to learn from a range of stakeholders, the SBE hosted four listening sessions comprised of affinity groups, including students, families, educators, and the general public.

Each session commenced by reminding collaborators of our community norms for engaging in courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006). We then started each discussion with a clip from the [Modern Day Racism in Education](#) panel where high school student, Alicia Ing, describes the purpose of Ethnic Studies: “Our books and what we’re reading should be used as a mirror and a window. We should be able to see our own, but it should also be a window into someone else’s experience that we would never be able to experience...” Building on Alicia’s call for Ethnic Studies, we asked participants to share their reflection points. We believed it was imperative to center student voice in the conversation, a principle at the heart of Ethnic Studies.



We also invited participants to share their thoughts on the following questions:

- In your opinion, what should be the purpose of Ethnic Studies?
- What would you like to see students walk away with?
- How should Washington State incorporate Ethnic Studies as part of high school graduation requirements?

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<sup>10</sup> Both broad and targeted outreach was conducted to recruit participants. The listening sessions were publicized through all SBE communication channels (social media platforms, listserv, etc.) and shared via multiple partner communication channels. Individual email outreach was conducted for the individuals and groups who expressed an interest in the work (either by helping develop the resolution or by reaching out after seeing the news article about the resolution).

Listening sessions had 133 people attend total. Educators, parents, students, counselors, administrators and more attended.

- What supports are needed to ensure a smooth transition of Ethnic Studies graduation requirement in WA?

This section outlines significant themes from these sessions. These significant themes emerged from those responses that generated common trends. The themes from these sessions were organized into three main categories: 1) defining (the purpose of) Ethnic Studies, 2) goals of Ethnic Studies, and 3) implementation.

## **Purpose of Ethnic Studies**

### **“Tearing Down the Default”**

For many attendees, Ethnic Studies presents an opportunity to challenge the status quo. Historically, U.S. curricula have been dominated by Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge. Eurocentrism is a cultural phenomenon in which European or Western perspectives are viewed and accepted as a universal truth (Quijano, 2000). In K-12 textbooks, for instance, White figures appear more than any other racial/ethnic group and are given reputable roles (Sleeter, 2016). For example, in a study of 20 social studies and language arts texts, Sleeter (2016) found that Hispanos (European “conquistadors”) held more “respectable” roles like senators, soldiers, and artists while darker-skinned Latinxs were depicted as field workers, labor union supporters, and food servers.

**“Tear down the default, right? To make sure that what our children learn and see, reflects the world that they really live in.”**

For students, challenging the standard means infusing concepts and practices that are often left out of the curriculum. For example, one student during the student session said, “I think Ethnic Studies, it's very much decolonization of academia, is focusing more on that community aspect rather than individual competitors... that we usually see, especially in a high school setting.” In other words, however, challenging the status quo does not merely equate to incorporating historically omitted narratives. For additional attendees, challenging the dominant narrative also means interrogating the very systems of power that have been traditionally accepted. For example, one attendee in the public sessions said, “it seems to me that the window needs to look out not only at the beauty of the different ethnicities and races that makes up our society, but also needs to look at the power dimensions of White privilege.” With this in mind, Ethnic Studies is more than the superficial celebration of historically marginalized groups. It is about the disruption of systems of power that have created inequities. To that end, it will be essential to consider how Ethnic Studies can provide students with opportunities to examine the status quo.

At its core, Ethnic Studies offers a chance to challenge systems of power that have historically omitted Black, Indigenous and People of Color. By “tearing down the default,” as one attendee said during the educator session, we can create the conditions for historically marginalized people to live authentic lives. Furthermore, it allows *all* students to learn about systems of power and develop the tools to make our society more inclusive and understanding.

### ***What does this look like?***

One of the ways Ethnic Studies challenges dominant discourses and paradigms is by challenging monolithic representations of communities of color. Educators draw on anti-essentialist approaches to present multidimensional representations of communities of color. Rather than essentializing<sup>11</sup> the experiences of racialized communities, Ethnic Studies teachers seek to present nuanced narratives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color that shed light on the complexities of these communities and tribal nations. A Kindergarten teacher in Oakland, California, for example, created a year-long interdisciplinary curriculum that explored immigration and nativism through a multifaceted lens. Using the Ethnic Studies framework, students learned the difference between terms like Indigenous and immigrant (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Within an anti-essentialist approach, Ethnic Studies disrupt settler-colonial<sup>12</sup> frames by recognizing the original stewards of the land.

### **Goals of Ethnic Studies**

Across the listening sessions and commentary received, various responses addressed the role of Ethnic Studies. The following significant themes are not in any particular order. We hope that the goals outlined here garner ongoing conversations about the purpose and goals of Ethnic Studies for students in Washington State.

#### **Promote Self-empowerment**

An inclusive orientation that places the experiences of historically marginalized people at the center has been the foundation of Ethnic Studies. In turn, research has demonstrated that when students feel valued and nurtured in the classroom, they are

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<sup>11</sup> Essentialism refers to the belief that all members in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways

<sup>12</sup> Settler colonialism refers to “the specific formation of colonialism in which the colonizer comes to stay, making himself the sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing” (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 73).

more likely to excel socially and academically (e.g., Vasquez, 2005). Similarly, many participants expressed that one of the goals of Ethnic Studies should be to affirm, validate, and honor students' experiences. One of the ways attendees suggested achieving this is by incorporating learning that builds on students' ancestral knowledge and history. For example, one participant in the parent session said, "Ethnic Studies should allow students to learn the history of who they are, where they come from, the strengths that brought them to be." In other words, students should be able to explore history that builds on their identity. For parents of color, in particular, having opportunities for their children to see themselves reflected in the curriculum is significant: "I want my children to learn about their cultures and the beauty of their cultures. I want my children to know that, that they can be proud of who they are and who their ancestors were, where they came from."

Another way that student experiences can be validated is by honoring their present-day experiences. One educator, for example, said, "I want them to understand that, yes, windows and mirrors; We can access perspective through stories and hearing those stories. But also, what if we reversed that equation and said, we believe that your story is true; you don't have to prove it because you're a human being, right?" Promoting self-empowerment, then, is about tapping into students' historical and contextual experiences. For that reason, it will be necessary for Ethnic Studies to draw on history that is often neglected while connecting it to students' present-day contexts. Altogether, affirming all students' experiences is crucial if we wish for students to feel empowered, cared for, and as research shows, excel in academic settings.

**"Ethnic Studies should allow students to learn the history of who they are, where they come from, the strengths that brought them to be."**

### ***What does this look like?***

Ethnic Studies teachers use culturally relevant pedagogies to leverage students' ways of knowing. Coined by education scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy advocates for the importance of educators being culturally sensitive and actively working to include students' cultural practices and ways of knowing into all aspects of teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A Filipino high school teacher in the South Bay of California, for example, drew on *Kuwento*, a Filipinx oral tradition that involves sharing stories (Jocson, 2008). Through the practice of storytelling, students were able to share their experiences as Filipinx Americans. In doing so, students' membership in the class felt validated.



## **Create a Sense of Community**

According to some attendees, Ethnic Studies should foster a space where everyone feels like they belong. One student, for instance, said, "in an Ethnic Studies -oriented class, students should feel safe to explore issues." One of the ways students can gain a sense of community in the classroom (that aligns with the last goal) is by providing opportunities for students to feel "seen" in the curriculum. As one student mentioned, "I think that having the opportunity to see oneself in a curriculum is paramount in order to feel like you are a part of the community." Research supports this statement (e.g., Halagao, 2004). When students' identity is validated, they are more likely to feel part of a community. Another way that Ethnic Studies can create a sense of community is through classroom collaboration. For the students we received feedback from, collaborating with their peers is important because it creates a sense of connection with their classmates. Overall, it will be necessary for Ethnic Studies to foster a sense of community, as it allows students to gain a greater understanding of belonging in academic settings and prepares them for the multicultural world they will join after they leave the K-12 system.

**"I think that having the opportunity to see oneself in a curriculum is paramount in order to feel like you are a part of the community."**

### ***What does this look like?***

Many Ethnic Studies teachers draw on community-grounded approaches to foster a sense of community in their classrooms. However, many teachers emphasize the importance of restructuring power relations in school settings to make this possible. For example, De los Ríos (2013) sheds light on how she cultivated a sense of community in her Chicana/o-Latina/o studies high school course in Pomona, CA. After teaching a unit on immigration, students in De los Ríos's class were tasked with a community project. As part of this, students collaborated with their peers to plan an event that raised awareness about anti-immigrant sentiments in California. The results of her study suggest that when teachers provide students with opportunities to collaborate with their peers and entrust students to make decisions of their own, they develop a stronger sense of membership within their schools and communities. One student, for instance, expressed how "walking into Chicana/o-Latina/o studies felt like home" (De los Ríos, 2013, p. 69).

## **Develop Well-informed Citizens**

For many attendees, one of the main goals of Ethnic Studies should be to prepare global citizens to engage and contribute to a multiethnic society. One parent, for example, stated, “we are hoping that our children are going to be growing up as [a] well-rounded person. Know not only about the basics but get tools that they need to be a good citizen, a good person growing up, being productive [sic] that, but also be able to connect with each other and work with each other.” With this in mind, if Ethnic Studies is integrated across subjects, it would provide a more robust understanding of the world.

One way that Ethnic Studies can prepare well-rounded global citizens is by exposing students to multiple perspectives. According to an attendee, exposing students to multiple perspectives will allow them to be “able to draw their own conclusions about the world.”

That is, rather than engaging students in one-sided views, students will have the opportunity to understand different perspectives, thereby making their own conclusions about a given topic. For several White parents, exposing their children to multiple perspectives is vital in fostering an awareness of cross-cultural experiences: “As a White mom in a predominantly White community, raising two White daughters; for my daughters to have an opportunity to have a window into someone else's life experiences is a pretty remarkable opportunity.” By exposing White children to the experiences and ways of knowing of historically excluded communities, they will be able to develop empathy, as another White parent added.

In addition, if we wish to prepare students to have a well-rounded understanding of the world, we need to go beyond surface-level understandings of racial and ethnic groups and present multidimensional representations. As one parent claimed, “what I hope Ethnic Studies can do for my kids right now is to offer a very complex and nuanced understanding of history and the world.” This is important because although the visibility of BIPOC has increased in the last decades, the perspectives embedded in these narratives are often superficial. For example, in an investigation of Texas standards, Noboa (2012) found that Latinxs were described as a monolith with an overwhelming concentration of Mexican descended people. Other groups of Color are depicted as non-Americans, foreigners, and stereotypical figures. For instance, in another study of five high school U.S. history texts, Eraqi (2015) found that Arab Americans were depicted

**“We are hoping that our children are going to be growing up as [a] well-rounded person. Know not only about the basics but get tools that they need to be a good citizen, a good person growing up, being productive [sic] that, but also be able to connect with each other and work with each other.”**

as foreigners and terrorists. For Indigenous peoples, uncritical views are also standard. As Reese (2007) shows in a study of children's books, Indigenous people are isolated from their respective tribal nations, as if Indigenous nations are homogenous. Therefore, Ethnic Studies, according to participants, should go beyond surface-level narratives and allow students to delve into the nuance of a multiethnic society. As an Asian identified parent mentioned: "I think we need representations that are deep and not shallow... for Asian American communities, we have a lot of diversity in terms of ethnicity. And I think also we have students who share that [sic] ethnic identity as Asian Americans. And then also there is in our kind of the difference between Asian-American identities and Asian identities. And I think we need a curriculum that would allow students to think about all these different layers of identities and an intersection of identities."

Finally, attendees suggested going beyond the frame of oppression that portrays communities of color within the oppression framework. As mentioned earlier, while the visibility of historically excluded groups has increased in the U.S. history curriculum, representations of groups are often narrow. Traditionally excluded groups are represented through a frame of oppression (King, 2019), where figures are depicted as voiceless victims who had horrific events occur to them rather than historical figures that have resisted systematic powers. This is reflected in the response from an educator, "We're more than just [formerly enslaved people]. We're more than just people begging for civil rights...we have so much that we contributed to society." With this in mind, Washington State residents call on Ethnic Studies to honor minoritized groups' contributions, particularly those whose narratives have been historically misrepresented. In this way, Ethnic Studies could provide an avenue for students to widen their lens about the present-day, enhancing students' cultural competency, critical thinking skills, and empathy for other members of society.

### ***What does this look like?***

Many Ethnic Studies teachers provide opportunities for students to learn about the complexity of ethnic groups. In a high school unit on Afro-Latinx resistance, Coffey and Espiritu (2016) challenge the perception that Latinxs are non-black. Drawing on the history of people's liberation in Latin America and the Caribbean, students learn about the role that Afro-descended people in Latin America played in resistance movements. Students can widen their lens about racial and ethnic categories through this exploration. Furthermore, they are better equipped to engage in nuanced present-day conversations about social issues and honor the complexities of diverse communities.

### **Prepare Socially Responsible Leaders**

Ultimately, by equipping students with an understanding of diverse perspectives and social structures, many participants hope that Ethnic Studies will prepare students to become socially responsible citizens. As one parent said, “students should be able to leave our educational system able to be responsive.” However, for students to be prepared to engage in society, they must be equipped with the tools to become responsive to social issues: “I think the purpose of Ethnic Studies is, as others have said, to offer them the tools so that our young people can bridge between differences in their workplaces and their neighborhoods, even in their own families as we're coming, becoming more multiracial, multiethnic and our families.” To that end, Washington residents hope that Ethnic Studies will foster a better understanding of the experiences of historically omitted groups and prepare young leaders to engage in social justice efforts.

**“Students should be able to leave our educational system able to be responsive.”**

### ***What does this look like?***

To equip students with the skills and abilities to enact change in their respective communities, Ethnic Studies teachers engage students in project-based activities that consider how systems of power affect students’ communities. A high school teacher, for example, used a mobile app to analyze social issues in California (L. Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019). Using the mobile app, students collected evidence of the infrastructural problems in their communities and presented their findings to the city council. By researching their physical surroundings, students could critique systems of power and conceptualize new possibilities for change. Thus, Ethnic Studies is an educational project that can build students' capacities and abilities to help elicit social change. Teachers can achieve this across all subjects by incorporating project-based activities and assignments grounded in the community they teach in.

## **Implementation**

### **An Interdisciplinary Approach**

Many attendees suggested an interdisciplinary approach rather than adding Ethnic Studies as a stand-alone course that students must take to graduate. One attendee, for instance, stated, “this is an important subject that everyone should learn, and Ethnic Studies can and should be

**“This is an important subject that everyone should learn, and Ethnic Studies can and should be embedded in every single subject matter.”**

embedded in every single subject matter.” Through an interdisciplinary approach, Ethnic Studies should be embedded across the curriculum.

### ***What does this look like?***

By design, Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that draws from multiple disciplines such as Anthropology, Economics, English, History, Linguistics, Philosophy, Political Science, Public Health, and Sociology. For instance, Gutstein (2007) paired math and economics to understand systemic racism in a seventh-grade math class.

Specifically, the students in the class, predominantly first-generation, working-class Latinxs, investigated the rates of rejection of mortgage applications completed by African Americans, Latinxs, and Whites in Chicago. Using proportional reasoning (decimals, fractions, ratios, and percentages), students understood the disproportionate rates of mortgage rejections. In the final task, students were asked, “does racism play a factor in mortgage rejection rates?” Despite a range of responses, students were able to use mathematical and economic skills and apply what they knew to complex social issues. To that end, Ethnic Studies goes beyond teaching students to read, write, or solve math problems. Ethnic Studies can bridge disciplines to expose students to complex issues in everyday life.

### **Challenges Moving Forward**

1. **Inclusion of all Perspectives** – Some participants expressed concerns about whose perspectives will be included in Ethnic Studies. For example, a student commented that it will be important for Ethnic Studies to recognize the narratives of Jewish people, who often face anti-Semitism.
2. **Teacher Support** – Many educators shared that they are worried about resistance from stakeholders that oppose Ethnic Studies. Others expressed concerns about teachers' limited training in Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy.
3. **Added Student Pressure** – Parents are concerned that an Ethnic Studies requirement will place more stress on students.
4. **Compromising Ethnic Studies Mission and Values** – Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline can be broadly interpreted, creating misconceptions and ill-defined definitions of the field. For this reason, Ethnic Studies proponents are worried that the original mission and values of Ethnic Studies are at risk of being misconstrued.
5. **Intentional Engagement with Tribal Nations** – Some Tribal nations have expressed concerns about their involvement with Ethnic Studies initiatives, as Indigenous peoples are more than just members of an ethnic group. They have sovereign rights.
6. **Proposed Reforms Do Not Go Far Enough** – While students have expressed excitement about a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement, some have

emphasized the importance of ongoing engagement as an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement is only one step in meeting their needs.

With these concerns in mind, stakeholders will need to consider the following questions. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum has inspired these questions.

1. What is the ethnic breakdown of the student population? Does the district have large numbers of linguistically diverse students? What countries and regions of the world are they from? What is the history of race relations in Washington State and its local communities? How have demographic or economic changes impacted the community?
2. Will an Ethnic Studies professional learning community be formed to include teachers from multiple disciplines and academic backgrounds? Will Ethnic Studies be incorporated across all subject areas? If so, how? How will teachers be protected from facing resistance?
3. How will Ethnic Studies be implemented? Will Ethnic Studies be a semester or year-long course or set of courses? Will the course be a stand-alone Ethnic Studies course, or will an existing course be modified to incorporate Ethnic Studies content, skills, and principles?
4. How can we ensure that the integrity of Ethnic Studies remains intact as it becomes institutionalized? How can we ensure that Washington residents and state and local organizations are well-versed in the purpose and impact of Ethnic Studies?
5. How can we respectfully engage with Tribal Nations? In what ways will Tribal Nations be included?

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

We believe our collective responsibility is to create educational opportunities that respond to all students' diverse views, experiences, and traditions, especially those whose narratives have been historically omitted or misrepresented. Moreover, we believe it is essential to foster social justice awareness to prepare leaders to contribute to an increasingly growing multiethnic society. The Washington State Board of Education is committed to these goals. However, the successful implementation of Ethnic Studies hinges on a collective approach that invites overlapping authorities, including state and local government organizations, to participate in Ethnic Studies discourse. In fact, according to a policy report based out of the University of Minnesota, successful Ethnic Studies policies have frequently relied on grassroots advocacy rather than top-down proposals. Furthermore, students, non-profit organizations, and higher education researchers have played a critical role in Ethnic Studies statewide initiatives (Boesch et al., 2018). With that in mind, we offer the recommendations below. Our

recommendations borrow from and align with several Ethnic Studies initiatives across the nation, including the [Washington State Ethnic Studies Framework](#), the [California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#), and the [Rethinking Ethnic Studies](#) resource book.

1. **Graduation Requirement** – Continue to support the creation of an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement within the existing credit framework. This means developing a policy that would require students to complete at least one course (in any subject area) that is designed and delivered through an Ethnic Studies lens.
2. **Youth Leadership and Voice** – Establish and maintain a formal relationship with student-led organizations to ensure that student voice, input, and considerations are part of the development of a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.
3. **Community Engagement** – Strengthen and expand initiatives on community engagement and partnerships to ensure communities are engaged in the process, sharing knowledge and expertise, contributing to local decision-making efforts, and building capacity.
4. **Tribal Partnerships** – Collaborate with Washington Native American Tribes and Tribal organizations in developing Ethnic Studies programs.
5. **Educational Collaboration** – Continue collaboration efforts between state agencies and educational partners to advance Ethnic Studies and realize its mission of providing a quality education that celebrates the humanity of all students.
6. **Higher Education** – Explore and pursue relationships with higher education experts in the field of Ethnic Studies.
7. **Strategic Plan** – Develop a comprehensive strategic plan for implementation, including an initial pilot that will enable the state to gather data about what works and doesn't work about the new requirement.
8. **Funding** – Develop a funding model that includes allocating funding for a statewide Ethnic Studies mandate to ensure its long-term sustainability and strategic growth.
9. **Professional Development** – Increase investments in high-quality, sustained professional development opportunities for all educators to ensure they understand Ethnic Studies pedagogy and content.
10. **Research** – Invest in ongoing research and inquiry around implementation challenges and successes in districts across Washington State, led by researchers that are knowledgeable in Ethnic Studies frameworks.

## Resources

For a video recording of each listening session, please visit [SBE's web page](#)  
For more information related to Ethnic Studies in Washington State, please visit the following links:

- [Watch Alicia Ing](#), a former Renton High School senior, share her view about Ethnic Studies and her experience during last year's [Modern Day Racism in Education student panel](#).
- [Watch Jasmin Patrón-Vargas address](#) the State Board at the September 2021 meeting. Topic: Ethnic Studies implementation in other states, recommendations for Washington.
- [Download a copy](#) of Jasmin's draft summary of themes from the four listening sessions (submitted for the November 2021 meeting. Her report with additional context will be available in December.
- Find the new [Ethnic Studies Framework and Implementation Tools \(ESAC\)](#) developed and recently submitted to the Legislature by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- Are you interested in learning more about Ethnic Studies teaching? Find resources for educators on the [Washington Ethnic Studies Now](#) web page.

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