



MEMO: ETHNIC STUDIES

September 2024 board meeting

Understanding Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the experiences, cultures, and contributions of various ethnic and racial groups in the U.S., particularly those who have been historically marginalized. It offers a broader understanding of history and society by highlighting perspectives that are often overlooked in traditional education.

- **Highlighting Contributions:** Ethnic Studies emphasizes the significant roles that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities have played in shaping U.S. culture, politics, and economy. By studying these contributions, students gain a more complete picture of the nation's history and the diverse influences that have shaped it.
- **Challenging Traditional Narratives:** This field of study encourages students to explore and question the dominant narratives they've been taught, bringing to light the stories and perspectives of those who have been marginalized. It promotes a more accurate and inclusive understanding of our shared history through the use of "counter-narratives" (stories and perspectives that have been excluded).
- **Fostering Critical Thinking:** Ethnic Studies is academically rigorous, encouraging students to engage deeply with multiple perspectives and to think critically about the world around them. By examining power dynamics and systemic inequalities, students are equipped to challenge racism and other forms of oppression.
- **Promoting Anti-Racism and Social Justice:** A key goal of Ethnic Studies is to promote anti-racism and social justice, linking movements that aim to end all forms of oppression. It provides a space for students to explore their own identities, understand the impact of systemic racism, and consider ways to contribute to a more just and equitable society.
- **Decolonizing Education:** Ethnic Studies seeks to decolonize the education system by examining how power operates in schools and communities. This involves questioning who has been allowed to shape knowledge and who has been left out, and then using that understanding to create a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for all students.

Ethnic Studies Is NOT...

- **About Blaming or Guilt:** Ethnic studies is **not** about making any student feel guilty or responsible for historical events based on their race or identity. It's focused on understanding different perspectives and histories, not assigning blame.
- **About Racial Superiority:** Ethnic studies does **not** promote the idea that any race is superior to another. It's about celebrating the contributions and experiences of all ethnic groups, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- **Indoctrination:** Ethnic studies is **not** about pushing a particular ideology or set of beliefs onto students. It's about fostering critical thinking, promoting understanding, and encouraging students to explore multiple viewpoints.
- **A Single Course or Class:** Ethnic studies is **not** confined to a single course that students must take. Instead, it's an interdisciplinary approach that can be integrated into various subjects like English, Social Studies, and more, enriching the curriculum through diverse perspectives.
- **A Curriculum Mandate:** The Board is **not** imposing a specific ethnic studies curriculum. In Washington, curriculum decisions are made locally by school districts, allowing for flexibility to meet community needs.

Discussion

Objectives:

- To support the Board members in reaching a shared understanding of Ethnic Studies
- To gather ideas and provide direction to staff on how the Board should move forward in supporting and advancing Ethnic Studies

Questions:

1. What resonates most with you from the above information?
 - Identify at least one key point you feel is crucial for the Board's shared understanding of Ethnic Studies.
2. Is there anything in these points that you feel needs further clarification or adjustment for us to reach a shared understanding?
3. How should the Board move forward in supporting the integration of Ethnic Studies within our limited authority?
 - *Examples:* Updating or expanding our 2021 resolution, incorporating Ethnic Studies into the legislative platform, and/or addressing Ethnic Studies through the FutureReady graduation requirements initiative.
4. What additional supports do you believe are necessary for Ethnic Studies to be effectively integrated into the current educational framework?