



## **MEMO: ETHNIC STUDIES AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION**

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*Submitted for the November 2020 Board meeting by Alissa Muller, Policy Manager for Career and College Readiness*

### **Introduction**

At the September Board meeting, Board members reflected on possible ways to support the existing work happening in our state around ethnic studies. The SBE Equity Committee is recommending the Board narrow its focus to two courses of action that are within the Board's statutory authority: (*Excerpt from the Student Voice section of the [September Board meeting agenda and supporting materials](#)*)

- The Board may wish to consider modifying the graduation requirements to add an ethnic studies requirement either as a stand-alone course or through embedding the content into existing requirements. This could be done through rulemaking provided the legislature has an opportunity to weigh in on the rules prior to adoption ([RCW 28A.230.090](#));
- The Board could recommend changes to the state learning standards to more explicitly address issues of race and racism, culture, and equity ([RCW 28A.655.070](#)). Note, recent legislation charged OSPI with periodically updating existing state learning standards that address global citizenship to incorporate best practices in ethnic studies. In addition, two workgroups have been established to work on standards and curriculum. The [Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee](#) (ESAC) was established in 2019 to develop curriculum resources and a framework to support teaching ethnic studies. In 2020, the [African American Studies Workgroup](#) (AASW) was established to develop recommendations for integrating, in a regular and ongoing basis, African American history. This would include examinations of racism and the history of the civil rights movement into curriculum, provided to students in grades seven through twelve. The Board may wish to look for options to support these efforts.

The rest of this memo will provide an update on the work of the ESAC and the AASW, as well as overview the Equity Committee's proposed actions for the full Board to discuss during this agenda segment at the November 2020 Board meeting.

### **Background Information & Proposed Actions**

A recent report from the Learning Policy Institute notes the recent push to ensure the availability of culturally responsive instructional materials: "several districts, such as Baltimore, MD; Palm Beach County, FL; and Philadelphia, PA, were already developing such materials

prior to the pandemic, noting research suggesting that culturally relevant curriculum has been found to increase student attendance, GPA, and course completion.”<sup>1</sup> Ethnic studies benefit students of color because they can see themselves reflected in the curriculum, but it also equally benefits White students by equipping them to participate in a global society: “as we reposition our pedagogies to focus on the practices and knowledges of communities of color, we must do so with the understanding that fostering linguistic and cultural flexibility has become an educational imperative, as multilingualism and multiculturalism are increasingly linked to access and power.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the priorities in SBE’s draft legislative platform is to incorporate ethnic studies and antiracism throughout K-12, to ensure every student sees their own culture reflected in their education and learns about cultures other than their own. In addition to the actions within the Board’s authority described above, the Board is also advocating for other actions to accomplish this goal including:

- Incentivize recruiting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.
- Incorporate antiracism and cultural responsiveness into educator preparation and professional development programs.
- Bolster efforts to embed ethnic studies throughout K-12 state learning standards and curricula and to increase ethnic studies offerings in our schools.

The Equity Committee believes that all of our K-12 state learning standards across content areas must include an explicit antiracism lens and appreciation of the contributions of diverse cultures. To accomplish this goal, the Equity Committee recommends that SBE advocate in support of dedicated resources for this work, including both monetary funds for professional development for educators and administrators, as well as collaboration time for school district staff.

## Learning Standards

Legislation passed in 2019 ([Senate Bill 5023](#)) and 2020 ([Senate Bill 6066](#)) tasked the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) with certain responsibilities relating to ethnic studies:

- By September 1, 2021, the OSPI shall identify existing state learning standards that address the knowledge and skills that all public school students need to be global citizens in a global society with an appreciation for the contributions of diverse cultures. These state learning standards must be periodically updated to incorporate best practices in ethnic studies ([RCW 28A.655.300](#)).
- By September 1, 2021, the OSPI shall identify and make available ethnic studies materials and resources for use in grades kindergarten through twelve.

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<sup>1</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., Schachner, A., & Edgerton, A. K. (2020). Restarting and Reinventing School. Retrieved from [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart\\_Reinvent\\_Schools\\_COVID\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart_Reinvent_Schools_COVID_REPORT.pdf), page 65

<sup>2</sup> Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 95.

- OSPI also staffs both the Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee (ESAC) and the African American Studies Workgroup (AASW).

### **ESAC and AASW**

The Equity Committee heard from representatives of the AASW and the ESAC at their meeting on October 28. Presenters included:

- Jerry Price, OSPI Social Studies Program Supervisor, Staff to both the AASW and ESAC
- Nasue Nishida, Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee (ESAC)
- Anthony Shoecraft, African American Studies Workgroup (AASW)
- W. Tali Hairston, African American Studies Workgroup (AASW)
- Brooke Brown, Member of both AASW and ESAC, WA State Teacher of the Year

#### *African American Studies Workgroup (AASW)*

The 2020 legislature created the AASW ([Senate Bill 6168](#), Sec. 501 [3][i]) to develop recommendations for integrating, in a regular and ongoing basis, African American history, examinations of racism, and the history of the civil rights movement into curriculum provided to students in grades seven through twelve. The workgroup must also examine current curriculum available to school districts as well as professional development needs for educators. A final report with recommendations is due to the Legislature by November 15, 2020.<sup>3</sup>

The workgroup members shared that by the time their report is due to the Legislature, they will have met six times over the course of three months. Although the scope of the workgroup has focused on social studies because of their limited time before their recommendations are due, workgroup members expressed their belief that this work needs to be expanded beyond social studies to all content areas. The workgroup has also created subcommittees focused on professional development, pedagogy, policy, and curriculum. A theme of workgroup conversations has been focusing on joy and telling the true story of the legacy of so many African Americans in our nation's history. (See slides in the OSPI ESAC & AASW Overview for more details.)

#### *Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee (ESAC)*

Per [2020 SB 6066](#), this committee was tasked with making recommendations to OSPI regarding the identification of ethnic studies materials and resources, developing a framework to support the teaching of ethnic studies to students in grades K-12, and considering the need for piloting ethnic studies materials and resources and professional development.

The ESAC members shared their belief that ethnic studies is at its core interdisciplinary, and thus should be incorporated across all content areas. The framework the committee is creating is the baseline for understanding the tenets of ethnic studies, but committee

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<sup>3</sup> Text courtesy of OSPI's website: <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/workgroups-committees/currently-meeting-workgroups/african-american-studies-workgroup>

members indicated that professional development is needed to bring this work to fruition. If this work is not done from an antiracist lens and done well, it could end up harming students when we want it to be a transformative, positive experience for students. Brooke Brown shared that, in her view, ethnic studies is about looking at power, with the foundation and goal of moving toward healing through civic action, supporting each other in our communities, and self-discovery. She also shared that curriculum should vary based on the students in the classroom—and so curriculum must change based on who is in the community and the classroom. (See slides in the OSPI ESAC & AASW Overview for more details.)

After the formal presentation, during dialogue with the ESAC and AASW members, Equity Committee members asked for their opinion on how SBE could best support the work of the two groups. Advice to SBE from ESAC and AASW members included:

- Work group members noted that there is some good energy in pockets around the state and districts should be encouraged to innovate based on their community's needs. This is why ESAC is developing a framework for the teaching of ethnic studies, as a skeleton with basic bones that will be a good first step toward this goal. In the past, Washington has done other things around the state to **pilot initiatives** to harness the work being done in the districts who are ready. There are ways to look at scaling this work, and piloting is one way to do this. The state can learn more from pilots and then tweak as needed to move forward in the next iteration.
- In state policy, funding amounts show what is important to us, both in fiscal resources and time. This is a first step. How can you help? Washington needs to make this work institutionally real. In education, words like innovation or best practice are often used. How can state policy better create the culture and structures for this work to take place at a local level? SBE could **highlight exemplary districts** doing this work already.
- To make this work real, the state must carve out time for this work as well as money, and a lot of educator training. If the goal is to scale the work beyond educators doing this on their own time and money, state policy leaders have to be intentional. There could be some leverage around SBE using your bully pulpit to influence **professional development** in this area.
- I wonder what it would look like if instead of requiring more of our students, Washington **required more of our educators**. Should teachers have to demonstrate they are incorporating this material into their coursework? If the state is truly trying to decolonize our curriculum, it's not about putting more on our students, but putting more on our teachers. Centering our most marginalized students so they are included in the coursework and their experience in our classrooms is a positive one. Part of what the adults in our system have to do is figure out how to share some of our power and privilege with our students.

## An Ethnic Studies Requirement

The Equity Committee recommends that the Board take action to establish an ethnic studies requirement as part of the state graduation requirements. The committee recommends the ethnic studies content be incorporated into the existing credit framework (rather than adding

an additional credit requirement). The ethnic studies requirement could be met by embedding the content into an existing core course, or by creating a standalone ethnic studies course. Regardless of which option a district chooses, a student must be exposed to the content before graduation.

One model to do this, without adding an additional credit requirement, would be to follow an approach more commonly seen in higher education where a student has to take a course with a particular designation or flag that is independent of subject area (e.g. Diversity, Writing, Quantitative Reasoning). Using an approach like this, a student could meet their ethnic studies requirement by taking a course in any content area that has the “flag.”

Regardless of delivery method, the ethnic studies course should focus learning experiences around diverse perspectives and cultures, particularly through an asset-based lens highlighting the unique contributions individual communities of color have made throughout history into the present. This would also mean recognizing what knowledge has been co-opted without providing appropriate credit and decolonizing the education system to recognize the inherent knowledge that each community of color already contributes to the world (in Native communities, this is frequently referred to as “Indigenous brilliance”).

In other words, “[ethnic studies] should advance the cause of equity and inclusivity, challenge systemic racism, foster self-understanding, build intergroup and intragroup bridges, enhance civic engagement, and further a sense of human commonality. In this way, Ethnic Studies can help build stronger communities, a more equitably inclusive state, and a more just nation.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Timeline Options for an Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement**

Staff suggest the Board consider one of the following two options to move forward with an ethnic studies graduation requirement:

1. The Board could direct staff to prepare proposed rules for the January 2021 Board meeting. To do this, staff would need direction from the Board at our November Board meeting to start the rulemaking process.
  - a. Per RCW 28A.230.090(2)(c): SBE shall provide an opportunity for the Legislature to act during regular legislative session on any proposed rules regarding graduation requirements.
2. Alternatively, SBE could consider a resolution at the January 2021 Board meeting, that could be developed in advance by the Equity Committee. This would signal to the education field and Legislature the Board’s intention around an ethnic studies graduation requirement and would mean rulemaking in a timeline to align with the 2022 legislative session. This would also allow the Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee

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<sup>4</sup> Cortés, C. E. (2020, June 26). Setting a High School Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement: State of California Suggested Basic Curriculum Principles. Retrieved from [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/20201022\\_Diversity\\_Webinar\\_Setting\\_High\\_School\\_Ethnic\\_Studies\\_Requirement.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/20201022_Diversity_Webinar_Setting_High_School_Ethnic_Studies_Requirement.pdf), page 12-13

to finish their work, as the deadline for the ethnic studies materials to be developed is September 2021.

- a. This would follow the past practice of the Board signaling graduation requirement changes through resolutions. For example, the Board signaled their intention to create career and college ready graduation requirements through two resolutions in [2010](#) and [2014](#).

## Conclusion and Next Steps

In the Equity Committee's deliberations, the purpose of the draft letter (also found in additional materials) to the Superintendent of Public Instruction is to extend SBE's support for the work of both the ESAC and the AASW, and formally state the Board's position around the importance of incorporating this work into all subject content area learning standards across K-12.

## Discussion Questions

- Does the Board wish to formally recommend learning standards to the Superintendent of Public Instruction via the draft letter included in additional materials?
- Does the Board wish to begin the rulemaking process to add an ethnic studies graduation requirement to the existing credit framework? Or, does the Board prefer to follow the resolution model for signaling changes to graduation requirements described above in 2a? (Note: the Legislature must have an opportunity to weigh in on the rules prior to adoption per [RCW 28A.230.090](#))

## Additional Resources:

- Student Voice Resources:
  - [Modern Day Racism in Education](#): The student panel organized by Margarita Amezcua and held in August 2020 informed SBE's Equity Committee's recommendations outlined in this memo and accompanying draft letter to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
  - [EOGOAC](#) October 20, 2020 Meeting: The concept of Ethnic Studies came up several times during this meeting, particularly during the BIPOC Student Panel. The students were clear that ethnic studies needs to be incorporated throughout the state K-12 learning standards, and that in their opinion, high school is too late to introduce these important concepts. In other words, their ideal world would include contributions of diverse cultures woven throughout the K-12 learning standards. During the panel, it was also suggested that this would be a prime opportunity to contact community leaders and bring them into elementary schools to share with students about their unique culture. View the [agenda](#) and meeting recording (available soon) on OSPI's website.
  - [NAACP Youth Council](#): This Seattle-area student organization has a [list of demands](#) that includes expansion of ethnic studies to ensure curriculum includes diverse perspectives throughout K-12 as well as an ethnic studies

graduation requirement. They also recently discussed their demands on a [webinar](#).

- Student Voices: Perspectives on Antiracism in Schools (REL Northeast & Islands Webinar from October 27, 2020—Recording will be available on [this page](#) soon.)
- The Root of Our Youth has a [podcast](#) where a group of college/high school students of color and allies talk about the prevalent issues in their schools and communities, where topics include modern-day racism/segregation, cultural identity, LGBTQ+ issues, mental health, and more.
- [Setting a High School Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement](#): This background piece, though developed for the California State Board of Education, would be helpful context for Board members to review.
- [2009 TED Talk](#): In this video, author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks about The Danger of A Single Story – her talk is a compelling case for the need to see life from multiple lenses to get a fuller understanding of our world and one another.