

Envisioning Ethnic Studies in Washington State Emerging Themes from the Ethnic Studies Listening Sessions

Working Definition of Ethnic Studies

- Destabilize systems of power
 - The purpose of ethnic studies is to interrogate and challenge systems of power
 - "Tear down the default"
 - "Remembering that ethnic studies is about dismantling white supremacy."
 - "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."
- Create the conditions for freedom
 - The purpose of ethnic studies is to transform the current conditions
 - "I think again, liberation, right? What should be a purpose that is liberation, right? What does it really mean to be free? What it truly means to be our full authentic selves without having to prove anything to anybody else."
 - "Ethnic studies is not only for students, but teachers...helping teachers to switch their mindset."
- An interdisciplinary field of inquiry
 - Ethnic studies is more than a class. It is a lens that be integrated into all subjects.
 - "This is an important subject that everyone should learn, and ethnic studies can and should be embedded in every single subject matter."
 - "I think English classes would be a really great place to see ethnic studies outside of like a social studies setting. You know, like a place where you can implement it into something outside of that."

Essential Goals of Ethnic Studies

- Promote self-empowerment
 - Ethnic studies aim to affirm, validate, and honor the experiences of students
 - "Ethnic Studies should allow students to learn the history of who they are, where they come from, the strengths that brought them to be here."
 - "I do remember we actually recently had our Hispanic Heritage Month assembly and one of coworkers asked me, Hey, can you help me with ideas? Because I feel really weird planning Hispanic Heritage Month and it's only white teachers planning it. So, they asked me do you have ideas? And I told them, I was like we have Hispanic students. What do they have? What are their ideas? Making sure we bring everybody to the table."
 - "I want them to understand that, yes, windows and mirrors and we can access perspective through stories and hearing those stories. But also, what if we reverse 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? And I honor that."

- Foster a sense of belonging in schools
 - Ethnic studies aim to foster a safe space for all students. Through classroom collaboration, students feel a sense of community and belonging.
 - “In an ethnic studies-oriented class, students should feel safe to explore issues.”
 - “A safe space for students to explore kind of their understanding of the world shifting.”
- Provide a comprehensive understanding of the world
 - Ethnic studies aim to expose students to multiple perspectives
 - “At the end of the year they're like, wow, we only had been taught like this one way, this one view for so long, I had no idea this other stuff was out there.”
 - “When I became a teacher, I vowed I was going to try to widen the lens for all of my students.”
 - Ethnic studies aim to present multidimensional representations of communities
 - “I want to make sure that the categories that we all consider to be in the world of ethnic studies are broad enough to include lots and lots of different people with different experiences.”
 - “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.”
- Enhance critical thinking skills and develop global citizens
 - Ethnic studies aim to prepare well-rounded students that are able to draw their own conclusions about the world.
 - “Show them the different perspectives and let them make up their own mind.”
 - “Ethnic studies would definitely be a place where we could begin the idea of being global citizens and respecting ourselves and honoring ourselves and others at the same time.”
 - “Ethnic studies should equip students with the skills to understand and analyze multiple perspectives or points of view on relevant topics so that they can develop their own opinions and present well-articulated arguments supported by evidence.”
 - Ethnic studies aim to prepare global citizens that can engage and contribute to a multidimensional society
 - 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.”
 - “I think there's a lot of nuance that comes with learning ethnic studies and understanding like cultural contexts for things that you see in the modern day like rap music or why certain slang terms exist, stuff like that.”

- “Build your knowledge bank of what other people's experiences are as well.”

Ongoing Concerns

- Racial tension and division
 - Parents are concerned that ethnic studies, not taught properly, can cause more harm than good.
- Overburden students
 - Parents are concerned that an ethnic studies requirement will place more stress on students.
- Teacher support
 - Educators voice concerns over teaching ethnic studies. According to educators, they are likely to face resistance. How can the State Board support them in this endeavor?