

To: California State Board of Education (SBE)
ethnicstudies@cde.ca.gov.

From: Robert Corr

Purpose

I am writing to comment on the proposed California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (MC). My son is currently a third grader in the California schools. I was born and grew up in California. Thank you in advance for considering my comments.

A number of issues have guided me to review and comment on the curriculum. First, we have a mixed race couple that we are friends with. The husband was stopped and held by a policeman while jogging in his own neighborhood because of his race - he looked out of place somehow - and he was not able to produce ID. Also, like many people, I have been very disturbed by the recent civil unrest. I am especially concerned about the divisive thinking that has led to some of these incidents. Finally, I see through my son's own assignments that racial divides are actively being taught in school. Where he used to view his playmates by how they interacted with them, he now says that racism is blacks and whites fighting. He has been done no favors by the emphasis in his classes on the civil rights movement and a de-emphasis on governmental workings. Why has this happened by the third grade?

In reviewing the Third Field Draft, I have concerns about what I see are major issues with the structure (and perhaps some definitions of Ethnic Studies itself). I have suggestions for improvement including resources and suggested areas of study. I contemplated commenting on specific areas as I read and marked them, but found some of the issues to be so fundamental, I am instead am making my comments rather general. I hope to see the MC substantially changed to avoid inadvertently raising a whole new generation of racists.

Issues

First, basic definitions are lacking or confused. Ethnic studies itself cannot decide whether to be race sensitivity training, history, philosophy, political activism or psychology. Here is the definition from the MC (*The History Social–Science Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve*):

“Ethnic studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses many subject areas including history, literature, economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science. It emerged to both address content considered missing from traditional curriculum and to encourage critical engagement.”

“As a field, ethnic studies seeks to empower all students to engage socially and politically and to think critically about the world around them. It is important for ethnic studies courses to document the experiences of people of color in order for students to construct counter-narratives and develop a more complex understanding of the human experience. Through these studies, students should develop respect for cultural diversity and see the advantages of inclusion.”

“Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this field, ethnic studies courses may take several forms. However, central to any ethnic studies course is the historic struggle of communities of color, taking into account the intersectionality of identity (gender, class, sexuality, among others), to challenge racism, discrimination, and oppression and interrogate the systems that continue to perpetuate inequality.”

This definition is confused and political. Northern Arizona University's definition is more succinct, but no less problematic:

"Ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity, as understood through the perspectives of major underrepresented racial groups in the United States. As a student, you will draw upon many disciplines and areas of thought to comprehend the sociocultural, intellectual, and historical experiences that inform the construction of racial, gender, and cultural identities. You will question the origin and continuity of race and racism, and perhaps discover your own area of research and action that can affect social justice for all."

Since "social justice" is mentioned here in the NAU definition and in places in the MC, it should be fully defined. Some definitions I found were:

- ✓ **Wikipedia:** " Social justice is the relation of balance between individuals and society measured by comparing distribution of wealth differences, from personal liberties to fair privilege opportunities."
- ✓ **Oxford:** "justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society."
- ✓ **Merriam-Webster:** a state or doctrine of egalitarianism (*defined below*)
 - 1: a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs
 - 2: a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people

These definitions imply that "social justice" removes inequality of *outcomes* not inequality of *opportunity*. Equality of outcomes is never seen in nature. In order to accomplish this outcome, persons *must be oppressed* to "level the playing field." Social justice, then, is a political movement encouraging the oppression of peoples. Such a political movement should not be taught in our schools.

How is this different than "justice"?

- ✓ Justice is usually associated with a process. Justice is that the process was followed.
- ✓ **Merriam-Webster:**
 - “the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments”
 - Also:” the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity”

Here, the "rules of law or "equity" can be conflicting, depending on the definition of equity used. Again, the rule of law implies that a particular process was followed. But what does "equity," also cited often in the MC, mean?

- ✓ **Merriam-Webster:**
 - Justice according to natural law or right specifically : freedom from bias or favoritism
 - : a system of law originating in the English chancery and comprising a settled and formal body of legal and procedural rules and doctrines that supplement, aid, or override common and statute law and are designed to protect rights and enforce duties fixed by substantive law
 - b: trial or remedial justice under or by the rules and doctrines of equity
 - c: a body of legal doctrines and rules developed to enlarge, supplement, or override a narrow rigid system of law

Here, if equity is defined as freedom from bias or favoritism, then it is distinctly different than equality of outcome. Again, equality of outcome never occurs in nature and would actually require favoritism to achieve.

Since these terms can be read with different meanings, the MC should explicitly state what is meant by each. Where the intent is to foster political activism, the material should be removed entirely.

Some of the methods in the lessons undermine the stated goal of helping to foster critical thinking. By using a framework of the "impacts of colonialism," students are guided to think in terms of colonialism vs. what existed before. They are not challenged to think about other potential trajectories of societies or the alignment of other worldly powers and the impacts those things may have had on a particular society. Similarly, "systemic racism" is presupposed to exist. If the world is viewed through the lens of "systemic racism," then other potential explanations for the situation in question are excluded. Could, for example, a cultural quirk be causing the same situation? Could it be that more than one factor is influencing a situation?

Suggestions to Improve the Model Curriculum

The first suggestion is to significantly reduce the scope and size of the curriculum. As has already been stated, all lessons related to "social justice," which is a political cause, should be eliminated. To remedy the underrepresentation of certain groups in history, why not push for more complete history curriculum instead of cramming these lessons into ES? For example the history of Pacific Islanders could be incorporated directly into the history curriculum for US or world history rather than becoming a part of ES.

Next, when reading the MC I was struck by the impression that it came from a very small group of like-minded people. Major improvements could be accomplished by simply increasing the diversity of views represented in the group writing the curriculum. University level professors of history (especially ancient) and possibly religious studies, could put contemporary and recent struggles among peoples in a broader context. Similarly, students of Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams can provide different frameworks, showing how different ethnic groups have overcome the discrimination against them.

One of the benefits I have heard for ES is for students to be able to discover their own identities and heritages. I believe these activities should be strictly elective. Allowance should be made for the level that any particular student wants to study their heritage. Some students will be introverted and may not want to discuss or even discover these things in an interactive way. Some students will have a passing curiosity, some will not be interested and some will feel strongly that they need to know this information. Furthermore, the Heisenberg principle applies here: by guiding the student through a process to discover their identity, an identity is *created* that was not there.

Suggested resources / bibliography to diversify the presented teachings

I did not do an exhaustive review of the bibliography for the MC nor for the individual lessons. I do notice glaring omissions of certain authors and books. Including these in the lessons would also help to diversify the views presented and thus foster critical thinking:

- Thomas Sowell
 - The Quest for Cosmic Justice
 - Black Rednecks and White Liberals
 - Discrimination and Disparities
 - Intellectuals and Race
- Walter E. Williams
 - Race and economics
 - The State Against Blacks
 - Up from the Projects
- Jason L. Riley

- False Black Power
- Booker T. Washington
 - Up from Slavery
 - Character Building
 - Frederick Douglass - A Biography
- Jane Elliott blue eye / brown eye experiment
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR0IbGa8_oTocslwhhF4fIIxWKfYbFt9uPgWuvQUJ2T5uhCfTRc5Us_SmY&v=dLAI78hluFc&feature=youtu.be
- (It seems the works of W.E.B Dubois are already represented).

Suggested areas of study

If not already covered in the MC, certain areas should be considered for study:

- ✓ The conquering of peoples and its outcome
 - Compare ancient conflicts such as
 - Babylon vs. Israelites
 - Meades vs. Babylon
 - What is justice in conquering?
 - Is it ever just?
 - How did the conquered respond?
 - How do these compare to more modern conflicts?
- ✓ How have discriminated-against groups improved their social status?
 - American
 - Irish
 - Italian
 - Polish
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Scottish vs. other Europeans
 - Political power vs. economic power vs. education
 - What were the relative outcomes?
 - What role(s) did culture play?
- ✓ Compare, contrast and rate relative success of various approaches to the US civil rights movement with regards to Black Americans:
 - Booker T. Washington
 - WEB Dubois
 - MLK Jr.
 - Malcom X
 - Black Panthers

Summary

As taught, the MC does not address any of my opening concerns. It does not seem to address racial sensitivity or help people get along better with each other

nor treat them by their character. By framing each group separately it can have the opposite effect, which is what seems to be happening with my third grade son. The curriculum, as framed, could be creating future racists. Rather than show how this group or that was oppressed in an ES lesson plan, the history of that underrepresented group could be taught in an expanded history curriculum. That is not to say that any oppression or conflict should be omitted from the lesson plan. Rather it should put in a broader historical context instead of being the main theme.

Sensitivity training could go a long way to addressing situations such as our friend encountered on his jog. To be effective, though it should be taught in the same method employed by the original Jane Elliott blue eye / brown eye experiment. That is, race neutral.

Finally, in our recent civil unrest, we do not often see calls for justice, but instead see calls for "social justice" - a political cause. How often do we ask students to look at what juries see and what their judgements are? How often are students asked to go back and determine how much of a role race played in incidents that are considered to be racist at the outset?

Thank you again for considering my comments.

Robert Corr