



August 23, 2019

**State Superintendent
of Public Instruction**

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

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Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

I am writing in strong support of the current Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft. I have carefully reviewed the draft that was crafted over the spring and approved for public comment in May by the Instructional Quality Commission. As some background, I have been actively involved in multicultural education at a national level since the 1980s (I am a past president of the National Association for Multicultural Education), and in ethnic studies for almost as long. In addition, I have reviewed the research on the impact of ethnic studies on students for the National Education Association (NEA) in 2011. My NEA research review is the only publication specifically noted in the AB 2016 ethnic studies legislation, and I have written an update of that review for a book about K-12 Ethnic Studies that is currently in press with Teachers College Press.

I am concerned that responses to the curriculum, particularly by white people, will lead to a dilution of the curriculum in a way that moves it away from the powerful and positive impact it can have on students. Research on the impact of ethnic studies is quite clear: of the studies assessing its academic impact, the great majority find a positive impact on the achievement of students of color. In addition, the great majority find a positive impact on the racial attitudes of diverse student groups that include white students.

Having spent decades as a national leader in multicultural education, I can see why this is the case. Although textbooks and other curricula now include contributions of and references to people of color more now than they used to, the overall way of looking at the world is still generally through a white point of view. This is particularly the case when taught by white teachers, or by teachers who have not grappled with the impact of a white-centered education on their own worldview. As students go through the K-12 system, research on students' perspectives finds students of color increasingly distrusting or simply not relating to what they are being taught in school. Unfortunately, this whitening of perspectives has shaped a lot of what multicultural education has become in K-12 schools. National leaders in

multicultural education such as James Banks and Geneva Gay do not water down its meaning or implications, but how their work is taken up in classrooms routinely does so; we cannot afford for that to happen with ethnic studies.

The ethnic studies model curriculum as written centers the perspectives and experiences of communities marginalized on the basis of race, and the ancestral knowledge of peoples who are not of European descent. To achieve the positive impact on students that research finds ethnic studies capable of effecting, that centering must remain. It is of value for white students to engage in such a curriculum, but white perspectives cannot dilute its focus on peoples of color. Being white myself, this is something I have spent my professional life grappling with. I stand ready to help Californians figure out how to help white people navigate ethnics studies, but not if the curriculum itself moves away from centering Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American, and Arab American experiences and perspectives.

I firmly hope that you will support the work of the ethnic studies curriculum writers and advisory committee. They have done an outstanding job of showing us what a model ethnic studies curriculum looks like. Units can certainly be added to it, but not in a way that undermines it.

Sincerely,

Christine Sleeter
Professor Emerita