

## Ethnic Studies Standards — Statewide Initiatives

As a way to increase student engagement and encourage students to connect to their learning, some states have begun efforts to incorporate ethnic studies into state content standards. Ethnic studies standards focus on the “knowledge and perspectives of an ethnic or racial group, reflecting narratives and points of view rooted in that group’s lived experiences and intellectual scholarship” (Sleeter, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Based on review of ethnic studies curricula, Sleeter (2011) found that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula and courses can have positive impacts on students’ academic and social outcomes. Ethnic studies standards can support students by providing learning that is “relevant, meaningful, and affirming of their identities,” encouraging students to take greater roles in their learning and knowledge construction (Sleeter, 2011). As students’ academic engagement increases, their academic skills can also improve, along with their attitude toward learning (Depenbrock, 2017).<sup>2</sup> As states consider how to improve the educational opportunities and learning outcomes of all students, incorporating ethnic studies into state content standards may be an effective way to implement content that encompasses students’ different experiences and to increase students’ academic engagement and agency.

This brief outlines current state initiatives to implement ethnic studies standards in California, Indiana, Oregon, and Texas. For each state, it includes links to any available meeting materials or standards information that the state has made available, as well as updates on the progress of ethnic studies standards development or implementation in the state.

### California

- ◆ In September 2016, California passed Assembly Bill (AB) 2016, which requires the state’s Instructional Quality Commission to develop, and the State Board of Education to adopt, modify, or revise, a model curriculum in ethnic studies.

<sup>1</sup> Sleeter, C. (2011). The academic and social value of ethnic studies: A research review. Washington, DC: National Education Association. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/NBI-2010-3-value-of-ethnic-studies.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Depenbrock, J. (2017, August 13). Ethnic studies: A movement born of a ban. National Public Radio. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/13/541814668/ethnic-studies-a-movement-born-of-a-ban>

## California (continued)

- ◆ AB 2016 encourages each school district and charter school that maintains any of grades 9 to 12, inclusive, and that does not otherwise offer a standards-based ethnic studies curriculum to offer a course of study in ethnic studies, based on the model curriculum.
- ◆ Based on the requirements of the bill, as well as public feedback, California developed guidelines (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ethnicguidelines.asp>) intended to direct the work of the contracted primary writer(s) and the Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/modelcurriculumprojects.asp>) to create a first draft of the curriculum.
- ◆ The model curriculum will undergo public review and editing by the Instructional Quality Commission prior to being recommended to the State Board of Education.
- ◆ In September 2018, California passed AB 2772 authorizing a local education agency (LEA) pilot program to make the completion of an ethnic studies course a high school graduation requirement. The bill requires the LEA to base any course required as part of the grant program on the model curriculum in ethnic studies, once the curriculum has been adopted by the state board. The bill also requires grants for professional development and technical assistance to be awarded to school districts for the purposes of applying for and implementing grants, and for grantees to submit a report to the state legislature that contains best practices and recommendations for including an ethnic studies course in the state's high school graduation requirements.

## Indiana

- ◆ In June 2018, Indiana approved ethnic studies standards (<https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/standards/ss-2018-ethnic-studies-standards.pdf>).
- ◆ A state-appointed committee of 10 educators, policymakers, and advocates determined the standards, which include themes such as "Cultural Self-Awareness," "Cultural Histories Within the U.S. Context and Abroad," "Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices," and "Historical and Contemporary Contributions."
- ◆ Effective in the 2018–2019 school year, Indiana high schools must offer an ethnic studies elective at least once a year. It is up to schools to decide which ethnic or racial groups are included in the curriculum, but the intent of this course is to focus on the perspectives of ethnic and racial groups, reflecting their lived experiences and their contributions to society.

## Oregon

- ◆ In June 2017, Oregon passed House Bill 2845, which directed the Oregon Department of Education to convene a 13-member advisory group to identify where current statewide social studies fail to recognize the histories, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic minorities and social minorities, and to develop ethnic studies standards and propose them to the State Board of Education for adoption into existing statewide social studies standards.
- ◆ The advisory group has been constructed and has begun to meet (<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/Ethnic%20Studies%20one-pager.pdf>), with six meetings planned in 2019 and with a stated goal of delivering a report on the proposed ethnic studies standards to the State Board of Education in summer 2019.

## Texas

- ◆ In April 2018, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) preliminarily approved a standard high school elective course in Mexican American Studies (MAS). The course is a culmination of five years of efforts by organizations, leaders, educators, students, and parents to band together for fair and accurate representation of Mexican American history and cultural integration into the Texas school curriculum.
- ◆ The SBOE approval of the course became controversial when the SBOE decided to change the course name to “Ethnic Studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican Descent,” removing “Mexican American” from the title. Supporters of the MAS course argued that the name change denied Mexican Americans the right to self-identify, and that the original name bestowed dignity and respect on the supporters’ communities and honored the contributions of their ancestors to Texas history, culture, and society.
- ◆ In September 2018, the SBOE voted to create curriculum standards for the elective course, retitled “Ethnic Studies, Mexican American Studies.” The standards largely mirror the standards that have been used to teach an MAS course in the Houston Independent School District since 2015, and will officially go into effect for the 2019–2020 school year.



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