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## California Department of Education News Release

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# State Board of Education Approves Historic Ethnic Studies Guidance for High Schools

SACRAMENTO—The California State Board of Education today approved guidance to assist local high schools in developing ethnic studies courses, classes that researchers say can improve graduation and college-going rates among all students—and especially teens of color. The vote makes California the first state in the nation to offer a statewide ethnic studies model for educators.

“California’s students have been telling us for years that they need to see themselves and their stories represented in the classroom. Today’s historic action gives schools the opportunity to uplift the histories and voices of marginalized communities in ways that help our state and nation achieve racial justice and create lasting change,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond. “By fostering our understanding of the struggles and achievements of people of color, ethnic studies benefit students of all backgrounds—and that is why today’s work is so important.”

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is aimed at empowering students by illuminating the often-untold struggles and contributions of Native Americans, African Americans, Latino/a/x Americans, and Asian Americans in California. The document includes University of California and California State University a–g–approved ethnic studies course outlines and lessons that expand beyond the four traditional disciplines of ethnic studies to help local districts tailor a course to meet local student needs.

While its use is not mandated, the curriculum is intended to supply local school districts with the background, ideas, and examples to begin local discussions on expanding ethnic studies offerings.

“Today we made an important step toward confronting and ultimately transforming racism in our society and in our state,” said State Board President Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond. “This day has been a long time in coming, and we are reminded daily that the racial injustice it reveals is not only a legacy of the past but a clear and present danger.

“Seventy years ago, in the height of the McCarthy era, W.E.B. DuBois wrote: ‘Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental,’” Dr. Darling-Hammond continued. “The freedom to learn...has been bought by

bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn.’ That is what this conversation is about: How we ensure the right to learn for all of our children.”

The vote today concludes four years of work to develop an ethnic studies guidance document aligned with California’s history/social science standards and curriculum frameworks, [State Board guidelines](#), and [state law](#). The model curriculum approved is the fourth draft and reflects revisions responsive to thousands of public comments.

Presenters who spoke in support of the draft today included civil rights activist Dolores Huerta; Secretary of State Dr. Shirley Weber; Karen Korematsu, daughter of civil rights activist [Fred Korematsu](#) and founder of the Fred T. Korematsu Institute; Temple University African American Studies Professor Dr. Molefi Asante; and Stanford University Chicano Studies Professor Albert Camarillo, among others.

“Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said racism is a sickness, and we have to become the healers,” Ms. Huerta said in urging the Board to adopt the curriculum, ending her comments with a spirited “Si se puede!”

Dr. Weber, who voted in favor of the model curriculum in November as a member of the Board’s curriculum advisory group, the Instructional Quality Commission, said: “A well-taught ethnic studies curriculum is beneficial to all students regardless of race. It transforms their lives.”

Dr. Weber is a San Diego State University Africana Studies professor emeritus who helped establish the discipline at the college in 1972. “My former students are different professionals because they have a different level of respect for others. These benefits are overwhelming for our students.”

Monterey County Supervisor Luis Alejo, who wrote the 2016 legislation directing development of the model when he was in the California Assembly, noted that he first introduced an ethnic studies K–12 bill 19 years ago. “Finally, there is movement across our nation. Our students need and deserve an education that more truthfully reflects the contributions of people of color,” he told the Board. “Our students must see themselves in what they learn.”

Because there are a growing number of schools offering ethnic studies—some of California’s largest school districts require it for graduation—\$5 million is included in the January budget proposal specifically for high-quality ethnic studies professional development.

“The ethnic studies model curriculum is a starting point,” Ms. Korematsu said. “It’s not an endpoint. This is a pivotal moment in California’s educational history. The fight for justice and human rights begins with education, and begins now.”

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