



Fresno Ethnic Studies Coalition

Who are we?

The Fresno Ethnic Studies Coalition is an organization representing Fresno Unified students, educators, and alumni dedicated to establishing Ethnic Studies at Fresno Unified School District.

Regrettably, Fresno Unified School District does not yet have a dedicated space for conversations about race and ethnicity. Author and social critic Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, writes, “The consequence of the single story is that it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult and it emphasizes that we are different rather than how we are similar.”

UC Berkeley’s Department of Ethnic Studies defines ethnic studies as a “... critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States.” As a separate discipline from History, Ethnic Studies specifically analyzes “the ways in which race and racism have been, and continue to be, powerful social, cultural, and political forces and their connections to other axes of stratification, including gender, class, sexuality, and legal status.”

California has one of the largest and most diverse student populations in the nation. Ethnic minorities account for over 71 percent of the student population. Fresno Unified is the 3rd largest school district in our state and more than 90 languages are spoken throughout our local schools. Over 90 percent of our students are students of color, much larger than the ethnic demographic of California.

Although Fresno Unified has begun to take steps to address the needs of students of color, these steps have fallen short. Data clearly demonstrates academic and Social-Emotional disparities amongst our student population. Given today’s escalating political climate, student voice and self-advocacy is needed now more than ever. Students desperately need a space to discuss race and ethnicity. The Fresno Ethnic Studies Coalition was created specifically to fulfill this desperate need. We are committed to a curriculum that presents the stories and perspectives of people of color.

According to a study conducted by Stanford University's Graduate School of Education, there are multiple benefits to students enrolled in Ethnic studies in both academic achievement and student engagement. Researchers documented marked increases amongst all subgroups in student attendance, academic performance and progress towards graduation. Specifically, "researchers found that attendance for those encouraged to enroll in the class increased by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points and credits earned by 23." Moreover, the most dramatic increases were shown by young men of color.

Dr. Cristina Herrera, professor of Chicano and Latin American Studies said, "...until our educational curriculum critically, compassionately and equitably includes the histories and experiences of people of color, Ethnic Studies is necessary to challenge those exclusions and gaps."

The Fresno Ethnic Studies Coalition stands in support of all of our students and their right to acquire a real education; their safety and well-being is our highest concern.

Our mission is simple: We demand and advocate for a robust and interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies program in the Fresno Unified School District. We believe by transforming education, we can transform our lives, and in effect transform our city.

Where does Ethnic Studies stand in the state of California?

Background

AB 331:

The bill would require ethnic studies to be mandatory for graduation from California high schools. Ethnic studies is a field of interdisciplinary study that includes economics, history, literature, sociology and political science. It offers a comparative study of the status of ethnic groups in the United States, focusing on their history, politics, culture, contributions and challenges.

California:

Given California's increasing demographic diversity, it is important that students build knowledge of the various racial and ethnic groups within our state. Incorporating Ethnic Studies courses into standard high school curriculum is a means to accomplish this. Ethnic studies, promotes respect and understanding among races, supports student success and teaches critical thinking skills. Additionally, the course provides students with the opportunity to learn about their respective culture in the context of California's history.

Requiring ethnic studies to be taught in high schools is an integral part of cultivating a classroom environment that is accepting of diversity. It is vital for young people to learn about their history, it is also important for them to feel like they can contribute to their communities in positive ways. AB 331 will help close the achievement gap by reducing student truancy and student enrollment, reduce drop-out rates, and better prepare Californian youth to be college prepared and career ready. **(Source: Ethnic Studies Now!)**

School Districts:

The following school districts have robust ethnic studies programs and board resolutions entailing their support of AB 331:

Centinela Valley Union HS District, Coachella Unified School District, Compton Unified School District, El Rancho Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Montebello Unified School District, Sacramento Unified School District, San Diego Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Barbara Unified School District, Ventura County.

Where does Ethnic Studies stand in the Fresno Unified School District?

As of the 2019-2020 school year, Ethnic Studies courses were offered three comprehensive high schools: Edison High School, Roosevelt High School, and Sunnyside High School. Educators across our district have proposed courses including: African American Studies, Chicano Studies, Latino Studies, and comprehensive Ethnic Studies.

Initially there was an Ethnic Studies committee that contributed a foundational scope and sequence draft. After some support and initial planning, no substantive support was given and negotiations with textbook publishers was halted. This, as Fresno Unified has adopted a lucrative textbook contract with McGraw Hill. Moreover, educators in Ethnic Studies have been working in isolation of one another in the Fresno Unified School District. Our districts' few Ethnic Studies teachers literally lack even the most basic resources.

In the 2020-2021 school year, Ethnic Studies courses in Fresno Unified will be expanded to include five comprehensive high schools and three middle schools. While these course offerings shine a light on the positive incorporation from the perspectives of diverse people of color, there are still shadows that exist. Ethnic Studies classes deserve to be supported by educators, school sites, and the district.

In order to address the lack of intentional support by Fresno Unified School District, the Fresno Ethnic Studies Coalition makes the following asks:

Specific Board Asks:

1. Pass a resolution making Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement
 - a. Don't force students to take unnecessary classes in lieu of an Ethnic Studies elective
 - b. Ethnic Studies courses shall enforce an explicitly anti racist curriculum.
 - c. Ethnic Studies courses must include a service learning project.

- d. All Ethnic Studies teachers shall meet qualifications set by the Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee and attend specific training and professional development in order to teach the course.
2. Ethnic Studies that includes primary and middle grades
 - a. Primary grades: specific units on cultural identity, stereotypes, human rights, multicultural education
 - b. Secondary, Middle School: a comprehensive class at every middle school that feeds into Regional High School
 - c. Secondary, High School:
 - i. Preferred option: Separate classes for each marginalized group which reflect the demographic population of the respective campus (i.e Black, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ, Indigenous) if sufficient staffing accommodates.
 - ii. Non-preferred option: Comprehensive Ethnic Studies at all HS, if insufficient staff is available

Specific District Supt Asks:

1. Creation of an Ethnic Studies Leadership Committee: This leadership committee will consist of current ethnic studies teachers who will meet monthly in order to organize ethnic studies guiding principles, curriculum that is aligned to CA Ethnic Studies Framework, a scope and sequence for all ethnic studies classes, and organizing professional development and advocacy opportunities.
2. Members: Membership in the leadership committee will comprise only of ethnic studies teachers.
 - a. Uziel Jimenez - Sunnyside HS, Ethnic Studies
 - b. Lauren Beal- Edison HS, African American Studies
 - c. Amy Sepulveda- Fort Miller Middle School, Ethnic Studies
 - d. Mercedes Martinez- Gaston Middle School, Latino Studies, African American Studies
 - e. Fernando Santillan, Edison HS, Chicano Studies
 - f. Jade Chatman, Powers Elementary
3. Creation of a functional Professional Learning Community: Collaboration between professional educators is vital. An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLC operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many)
 - a. Ethnic Studies Leadership Committee will be compensated for 120 hours in summertime to develop curriculum which will be used District Wide
 - b. Ethnic Studies Leadership Committee will receive paid planning time throughout the school year to collaborate with all ES instructors throughout the district.

- c. Structured Professional Development amongst all district ES teachers with subs provided every month.
 - d. ES teachers shall meet at an Ethnic Studies specific course meeting during buyback each quarter.
4. Creation of an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee: The Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee shall create a comprehensive plan to train, recruit, and develop Ethnic Studies teachers.
 - a. Professional Development will rely on collaboration with local and state organizations/entities focused on Ethnic Studies & Curriculum Building
 - b. The Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee shall establish requirements for teachers of ES
 - c. The Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee shall create a plan for implementation of ES as graduation requirement district wide.
5. The ES Advisory Committee shall be comprised of:
 - a. An instructional superintendent, administrator, or director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning Department
 - b. Teacher on Special Assignment that is *qualified (ie, at minimum a B.A in Ethnic Studies)* to coordinate meetings/implementation of course curriculum with input from ES Leadership Committee
 - c. Academic(s) in field of Ethnic Studies (curriculum and pedagogy) with input from ES Leadership Committee
 - d. FTA representative with approval from ES Leadership Team.
 - e. ES Leadership Committee
 - f. Student and Community stakeholder(s)

“If we commit ourselves as a city – as educators, students, school leaders, district leaders, and union leaders – to creating and sustaining a more relevant and humanizing curriculum, we are sure to see our investment pay off in increased engagement, academic growth, and positive attitudes towards learning. Our students deserve no less.” **(Source: Natalia Cuadra-Saez, Latinos For Education)**