

Californians for Civic Learning Civic Learning and Ethnic Studies December 7, 2021

Schools with highly effective civic learning programs driving strong ethnic studies courses can restore our nation, our communities, and our institutions to places of civility, respect, and integrity, committed to upholding the ideals of our democratic creed for all Americans. In high quality civic learning, students learn to think critically, develop research skills, assess and synthesize information, and present coherent arguments based on data. ¹

All California students need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be informed, actively engaged citizens. They need to understand why and how to find common ground in our pluralistic society while protecting the rights of its inhabitants regardless of race, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, or other identities.

We believe it's time for all California schools, beginning in the elementary grades, to devote significant instructional time to teaching students their civic responsibilities and rights before the noble promise of our republic disintegrates. And because civic learning centers on the continual struggle to make our nation "a more perfect union," ethnic studies provides the perfect context for civics to protect our shared democratic ideals, norms, and practices for all Americans.

Two recent actions, the Governor and Legislature's passing of an ethnic studies graduation requirement and the State Board of Education's adoption of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum underscore the belief that a conscious awareness of being part of an interrelated community of others equips students to contribute to the public good and help strengthen democracy and democratic institutions.

In fact, the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum explicitly describes how ethnic studies contributes to the larger goal of education to prepare young people to become informed, responsible, actively engaged citizens. As stated in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum:

- *Ethnic studies should help students become more engaged locally and develop into effective civic participants and stronger social justice advocates, better able to contribute to constructive social change.*²
- *It (ethnic studies) can help students learn to discuss difficult or controversial issues, particularly when race and ethnicity are important factors.*³
- *In short, through ethnic studies, students can develop civic participation skills, a greater sense of self-empowerment, and a deeper commitment to life-long civic engagement in the cause of greater community and equity.*⁴
- *This emphasis on citizenship within the pedagogy provides students with a keen sense of ethics, respect, and appreciation for all people, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and beliefs.*⁵

Californians for Civic Learning, a volunteer group of educational and civic leaders, is dedicated to promoting high-quality civics education. We support initiatives to ensure that all students, beginning

¹ *Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint For Action*, Page 23, 2014

² *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum*, Chapter 1, California Department of Education, 2021

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum*, Chapter 3, California Department of Education, 2021.

in kindergarten, are provided high quality learning opportunities that prepare them to be informed, skilled, empathetic, respectful, active, and engaged citizens of their communities, state, and nation. [EdSource](#) provided a good summary of CCL's Position Statement that frames this discussion vis-a-vis Ethnic Studies.

We believe an ethnic studies program can also help achieve this goal, but only if the curriculum includes civic learning strategies and resources for students to identify, research, dialogue, and analyze important issues in order to take responsible, informed action to address them. The [Civic-Learning Compendium for the California History-Social Science Framework](#) provides action-oriented instructional practices to help students develop increased civic capacities and competencies in K-12. We urge you to purposefully include civic learning as an essential component of your ethnic studies program.