

**Recommendation for Incorporation of Ethnic Studies
Santa Barbara Unified School District
Board Report (6/12/18)**

Statement of Purpose

Pursuant to the stated mission of the Santa Barbara Unified School District to “empower students to be productive citizens in a diverse and changing world,” the High School Graduation Requirements Committee recommends the establishment of an ethnic studies graduation requirement beginning with the graduating class of 2023. In support of this aim, it is the vision of the District that a new “Ethnic and Social Justice Studies” (working title) elective course be piloted at traditional and alternative District high schools by School Year 2020-2021.

Rationale:

Student achievement data shows a clear gap between students of color and their white counterparts across virtually every metric. Recent research reveals that ethnic studies courses and culturally relevant teaching can provide effective support to underrepresented students and deliver the following outcomes: increased student engagement and positive self-image, greater cultural and historical understanding between student groups, reduced truancy and dropout rates, increased GPA and college-going rates.¹ Additionally, both white students and students of color have been found to benefit academically and socially from ethnic studies.² More than two-thirds of SBUnified students are students of color, making this issue an essential one for our district.

Background:

Legislative Context:

- In July 2011, Governor Jerry Brown approved SB 48, The Fair Accurate Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act. This legislation requires the inclusion of underrepresented groups in social science instruction with particular emphasis on their role in and contributions to the economic, social, and political development of California.
- In September 2016 California Gov. Jerry Brown signed [AB 2016](#) which requires the Instructional Quality Commission to develop model curriculum for ethnic studies and encourages each district or charter school that maintains grades 9-12 to offer a course of study in ethnic studies based on the model curriculum.
- [AB 2772](#) represents pending legislation which would require a one-semester course in ethnic studies based on the model curriculum in either social studies or English, commencing with the 2023-2024 school year.

Local Context:

- Santa Maria Joint Union High School District
Since 2015 the District’s Ethnic and Gender Studies Committee has been meeting, receiving intersectional ethnic studies professional development, and is now developing course curriculum

¹ Dee and Penner, 2016

² Sleeter, 2011

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with a plan to implement throughout the district over the next two years.

- Ventura Unified School District

In March, the superintendent issued a mandate to pilot an ethnic studies course at all high schools in Ventura Unified next Fall.

- Oxnard Union High School District

Last month a revision to the Board Policy on Graduation Requirements was passed which requires 5 credits of “Ethnic Studies/Cultural Geography” beginning with the Class of 2024.

SBUnified Context

- Cultural Proficiency

In recent years, the Santa Barbara Unified School District has established a reputation for prioritizing the development of culturally proficient school communities. This commitment is explicitly embedded in the Strategic Plan, the Superintendent’s priorities, and the Local Control Accountability Plan. A wide array of stakeholders has participated in robust programming and professional learning aimed at supporting this priority, often in partnership with local non-profits and other community organizations. Multiple community members, and notably organizations such as *Ethnic Studies Now!*, have called for the development and implementation of ethnic studies curriculum, including a graduation requirement.

- High School Graduation Requirements Committee

District staff revived, reconstituted, and repurposed this committee in May of 2017 and a subcommittee on ethnic studies was formed to study the issue within the context of existing programs, course scheduling constraints, curricular shifts, and graduation requirements. Special attention was given to the topic of ensuring high quality instruction through appropriate teacher credentialing and training.

Next Steps

While there are extrinsic reasons for moving forward in establishing ethnic studies courses, and for requiring completion of this coursework for graduation, the main impetus is the intrinsic value of creating safe spaces in which students from all backgrounds can explore issues of identity in order to build bridges of understanding to support the forward progress of our multicultural society. To this end: District staff will undertake the following tasks.

- 1) Incorporate the addition of ethnic studies as a graduation requirement into Board Policy 6146 with the aim of securing approval from the Board of Education by November 13, 2018.
- 2) Determine the criteria to designate existing or new English or Social Studies courses as eligible to fulfill the proposed ethnic studies graduation requirement.
- 3) Design and execute a process for developing a pilot “Ethnic and Social Justice Studies” course that will ensure the engagement of diverse stakeholders.