February 22, 2021

Dear Superintendent Tony Thurmond and the CA State Board of Education:

In a January 21, 2021 letter addressed to the Superintendent and SBE President, thirty-five academics argued that the draft CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), section titled “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies,” made unsubstantiated claims about the benefits of Ethnic Studies, and requested removing that section or its claims. Subsequently, a January 27th press release by AMCHA, an organization closely tied to the letter, contextualized the letter in a broader critique of “Critical Ethnic Studies” as socially “divisive,” a form of political “indoctrination,” and anti-Semitic. We disagree.

We, a statewide alliance of educational scholars across California, urge you to retain and bolster the section on “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies,” and more generally, we urge you to support the continued development and offering of authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum in public schools across the state. In what follows, we offer research to strengthen the section, “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies,” and the ESMC as a whole.

THE NEED FOR ETHNIC STUDIES. We begin by reiterating what scholars, educators, students, and families have argued for decades, and what over 2300 educators and organizations across the country stated collectively just a few months ago, namely, that racism and other inequities have long existed and continue to exist; that we cannot advance justice without learning in deep and rigorous ways about racism and other inequities; that the traditional, whitewashed curriculum of U.S. education obscures these realities and, therefore, is harmful to all students and counter to our nation’s ideals of democracy and freedom; and that education can do better through such movements as Ethnic Studies and multicultural education. The statement by over 2300 educators also explains why the rhetoric of “divisiveness” and “indoctrination” when referring to all Ethnic Studies curriculum is misinformation at best, and disinformation at worst.
Our 2018 research brief on *Ethnic Studies and Critical Multicultural Education* clarifies that, as in any field, there are different approaches to anti-racist curriculum, and that we advocate for “critical” and intersectional approaches, arguing that “it was the recognition of the anti-democratic, monocultural nature of U.S. public education that catalyzed the emergence or expansion of ethnic studies and multicultural education during the Civil Rights Movement decades ago. . . . Ethnic studies as a field first emerged in universities to understand and reclaim the cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge of racialized groups.” Ethnic Studies teaches about different groups, but also teaches about broader systems of oppression, including those along multiple dimensions of diversity. Our 2018 research brief points to many additional resources for those interested in learning exactly what Ethnic Studies does and does not do.

Ethnic Studies responds to the exclusion that many students from minoritized groups (i.e., African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native American) contend with when being taught a biased K-12 curriculum that (based on analyses of textbooks) continues to represent white people exponentially more, and more complexly, than both the Native peoples of the land where the course is taught, and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) generally and specifically. Students notice who is and is not in the curriculum they are supposed to learn, as numerous case studies based on interviewing students show. This representative quotation by a Black high school student illustrates the concern:

“It’s basically what you know, what you need to know to graduate…not like the real history of the world, just like what your teacher thinks important … I know that a lot of our history, like Black women and things we did as maybe civil rights leaders in history is missing. It’s what you supposed to know to get through this system, you know, to graduate…just to keep your teachers or the testers happy.” (Woodson, 2015, p. 62, as cited in Sleeter & Zavala, *Transformative Ethnic Studies in Schools*, 2020)

THE RESEARCH BASIS FOR ETHNIC STUDIES. The January 21st letter argues that all of the ESMC claims were unsubstantiated because of either a lack or a mischaracterization of empirical research. Although the ESMC, like any reporting of research, may not have been persuasive to some readers about the substantiation of its claims, and may not have presented a comprehensive review and meta-analysis, we disagree that the claims are actually unsubstantiated, for at least three reasons.

First, we value different research methodologies and designs for making claims about the value and impact of Ethnic Studies. One of the main concerns in the January 21st letter is methodological, as when critiquing small-scale and/or non-experimental studies as ungeneralizable or otherwise not warranting claims of impact. The letter emphasizes that most of the studies cited were small-scale in nature; or when critiquing the method of statistical analysis of one study, the letter takes issue with its use of regression discontinuity analysis rather than experimental group comparison. As scholars with expertise in a wide range of research
methodologies, we disagree with the letter’s narrow criteria for determining which types of study designs offer “evidence.” Furthermore, much more research exists than what the ESMC was able to discuss. Consider, for example, quasi-experimental quantitative studies published recently, which we point to in Appendix A. By valuing different research methodologies and designs, we disagree with the letter that the cited studies were unjustified in their claims or that, in general, the ESMC overreached in its summaries of the research.

Second, we have reviewed the growing body of research, which we believe makes clear that Ethnic Studies benefits all students. Due to time constraints, the ESMC relied heavily on the 2011 review of research by C. Sleeter, and perhaps not surprisingly, the January 21st letter focused primarily on critiquing either that review’s summaries of the studies or the design of the cited studies themselves. As noted above, we value a range of research methodologies, and therefore, we do not agree with such critiques of the 2011 review; in fact, we know that that review informed arguments in the landmark *Arce et. al. v. Huppenthal* court case in Arizona regarding the value of Ethnic Studies and the legality and ethics of banning it (a ban the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals found to be unconstitutional and based on racial animus). But as if that was not compelling enough, we point you to C. Sleeter’s updated and expanded review of research, published last year in *Transformative Ethnic Studies in Schools*—we categorized and summarized the relevant studies in three charts in Appendix A. As you will notice, 26 of the 28 cited studies found a positive impact on students.

Third, we listen to our students, as we know that you do as well. It is not difficult to find evidence that, as we hear countless students of color report, “Ethnic Studies saved my life.” As educational scholars, we value experimental group comparison, but we also value the wisdom and guidance as captured in the voices of those who are most impacted by an education that strives as boldly toward democracy and justice as does the type of Ethnic Studies animated in the ESMC.

We believe it is important to clarify that the ESMC is an illustration of what can be taught, and not a script of what must be taught, even if and when Ethnic Studies becomes required curriculum. We support requiring Ethnic Studies for all California students, and supporting schools and educators in teaching Ethnic Studies as described above. Such legislation and concomitant resources would be a historic step towards racial and educational justice.

To support these goals, we urge the State Board of Education to take the following four steps:

1) Retain and expand the ESMC section on “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies.” We offer a summary of relevant research in three charts in Appendix A, and suggested edits to the ESMC in Appendix B.
2) Provide sufficient financial and other resources and support for researchers to examine and document the impact of Ethnic Studies on K-12 students in California. Important research already exists, but more is needed about any number of topics—from curriculum design to student impact to teacher preparation to community capacity building—and using any number of research designs—from large-scale experimental design to case studies to teacher and student testimonies.

3) Designate Ethnic Studies as a field for credentialing teachers, and provide sufficient financial and other resources and support for teacher-preparation pre-service programs and professional-development programs to offer pathways to Ethnic Studies teaching credentials and preparedness. The ESMC illustrates what is possible, but as with any field of study, the quality of teachers matters, and we should insist that teachers of Ethnic Studies be well-prepared to do so.

4) Ensure that decisions about Ethnic Studies centrally involve expert practitioners and scholars, including decisions about curricular frameworks and content and professional development and certification. For example, as the ESMC continues to undergo revision, and more urgently, as the SBE considers revisions for its March 17th meeting, we ask that you bring the final State Superintendent/CDE recommended ESMC edits to a place strong and authentic enough that the original ESMC writers, advisory committee members, and Ethnic Studies expert practitioners and scholars can once again support.

An accurate, bold, authentic, and research-based Ethnic Studies curriculum is needed now more than ever. We stand ready to work with you to make that happen.

CARE-ED: California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education
-Contact Person: Christine Sleeter, Co-Founder
-Contact Person: Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, Executive Director

As of February 22, the following 442 educational scholars in California have endorsed this letter (affiliations are listed for identification purposes only):

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Adrian I. P-Flores, PhD, UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow, UCLA
Adrianna Marie Bayer Simone, Assistant Professor, Los Medanos College
Agustin Herrera, Graduate student, Claremont graduate university
Agustin Palacios, Ph.D., Professor, Contra Costa College
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Xamuel Banales, Associate professor, CSU Stanislaus
Zainab Abdullah, Intern, Los Rios Community College District
Ziza Delgado Noguera, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies, Fullerton College
Appendix A: Three Charts of Research about Benefits of Ethnic Studies

1. Ethnic Studies Curriculum and Student Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Outcome(s)</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dee, Penner, 2017</td>
<td>SFUSD Ethnic Studies</td>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>GPA, attendance, credits toward grad</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabrera et al., 2014</td>
<td>TUSD’s MAS program</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>Standardized tests, graduation rates</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cammarota, Romero, 2009</td>
<td>TUSD’s Social Justice Ed Project</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Pre-post no control group, interviews</td>
<td>Test scores, graduation rates, sense of empowerment</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kisker, et al., 2012</td>
<td>Math in a Cultural Context</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Math achievement tests</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipka, et al., 2005</td>
<td>Math in a Cultural Context</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Benchmark achievement tests</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarty &amp; Lee, 2014</td>
<td>Native American Community Academy</td>
<td>Middle, H.S.</td>
<td>Qualitative; pre-post no control gp</td>
<td>Basic skills achievement</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarty, 1993</td>
<td>Rough Rock Navajo English-Lang Arts</td>
<td>Elem</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Reading scores</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Intervention Description</td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Study Type</td>
<td>Outcome Measures</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Matthews &amp; Smith, 1994</td>
<td>Culturally relevant science, Am Indian</td>
<td>4-8th grades</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Science achievement, attitudes toward science &amp; Native Americans</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan, 2012</td>
<td>Africentric U.S. history course</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>Academic achievement, student self-efficacy</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker, 2017</td>
<td>Afrocentric curriculum</td>
<td>3 - 5th</td>
<td>Correlational</td>
<td>Reading scores</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, 2017</td>
<td>Culturally relevant texts</td>
<td>1-5th grade</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental control group</td>
<td>Reading comprehension, word recognition</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rickford, 2001</td>
<td>Culturally relevant texts</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>Post-interviews, no control</td>
<td>Comprehension, higher order thinking</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyson, 2002</td>
<td>Multicultural literature in social studies class</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>Interviews, classroom observations</td>
<td>Use of text, knowledge of social issues</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginwright, 2000</td>
<td>Afrocentric culture infused through curriculum and school</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Qualitative case study</td>
<td>Academic achievement, academic participation</td>
<td>No impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 2. Ethnic Studies Curriculum + Asset-Based Pedagogies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s), Curriculum</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Outcome(s)</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>López, 2016, 2017, 2018; Sharif Matthews &amp; López, 2018</td>
<td>Asset-based pedagogy: academic expectations, critical awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural content integration, beliefs about/use of Spanish language</td>
<td>3rd-5th grade</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>Reading scores, math scores, ethnic identity affirmation, achievement identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, 1995; 2001; 2006; 2007</td>
<td>Cultural modeling (Literature courses)</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Literary analysis skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krater et al., 1994; Krater &amp; Zeni, 1995</td>
<td>African American literature infused</td>
<td>Middle, high school</td>
<td>Pre-post, no control group</td>
<td>Writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjapong, Emdin, 2015</td>
<td>Hip hop in science classroom</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Understanding, enjoyment of science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone &amp; Stewart, 2016</td>
<td>Critical Hip Hop Rhetoric Pedagogy</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Successful course completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall &amp; Martin, 2013</td>
<td>Critical hip hop pedagogy</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Engagement, retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Ethnic Studies Curriculum and Student Identity, Sense of Self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Outcome(s)</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, Sullivan &amp; Bybee, 2006</td>
<td>Project EXCEL, an African-centered one-semester class</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Communalism, achievement motivation</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, et al, 2012</td>
<td>Project EXCEL, an African-centered one-semester class</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, et al., 2008</td>
<td>African American after school program</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Pre-post, no control</td>
<td>Ethnic identity, sense of empowerment</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgrave, et al, 2000</td>
<td>Africentric extracurric program</td>
<td>Ages 10-12</td>
<td>Pre-post control group</td>
<td>Ethnic identity, self-concept</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiggan &amp; Watson-Vendezier, 2018</td>
<td>Multicultural and African-centered school</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Academic achievement, critical thinking, identity</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halagao, 2004-2010</td>
<td>Pinoy Teach: Filipino studies class</td>
<td>Higher ed</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Critical thinking, identity, empowerment</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasquez, 2005</td>
<td>Chicano literature class</td>
<td>Higher ed</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Recommended Edits for ESMC “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies”

Appendix B. Recommended Edits for ESMC “The Benefits of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

The Benefits of Ethnic Studies

With Our Recommended Edits to Strengthen Section

Benefits of Ethnic Studies

In a 2011 report for the National Education Association entitled *The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies*, Christine Sleeter stated that:

> There is considerable research evidence that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students. Curricula are designed and taught somewhat differently depending on the ethnic composition of the class or school and the subsequent experiences students bring, but both students of color and white students have been found to benefit from ethnic studies.\(^1\)

As the demographics continue to shift in California to an increasingly diverse population—for example, with Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x students comprising a majority in our public schools and students of two or more races comprising the fastest growing demographic group—there is a legitimate need to address the academic and social needs of such a population. All students should be better equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate our increasingly diverse society.\(^2\) Ethnic studies provides the space for all students and teachers to begin having these conversations. Furthermore, ethnic studies scholars and classroom teachers established through research and classroom experiences, respectively, that courses in the field have shown they can:

- Help students develop a strong sense of identity\(^3\)
- Contribute to students’ sense of agency and academic motivation\(^4\)
- Provide students with skills and language to critically analyze, respond to, and speak out on social issues through community responsive youth civic engagement\(^5\)
- Increase critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and interpersonal communication skills[^6]
- Lead to an increase in attendance[^7]
- Lead to an increase in standardized test scores[^8]
- Lead to an increase in GPA, especially in math and science[^9]
- Lead to an increase in graduation and college enrollment rates[^10]
- Introduce students to college level academic frameworks, theories, terms, and research methods[^11]
- Strengthen social and cultural awareness[^12]
- Help to foster a classroom environment of trust between students and teachers, enabling them to discuss contentious issues and topics, as well as current events
- Help students connect to their historical and ancestral origins
- Reduce stereotype threat
- Aid in the social-emotional wellness of students


