

Date of Hearing: March 13, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair  
AB 331 (Medina) – As Introduced January 31, 2019

**SUBJECT:** Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: ethnic studies

**SUMMARY:** Requires all students to complete a semester-long social studies or English language arts course in ethnic studies to graduate from high school, based on a state-adopted model curriculum, commencing in the 2023-24 school year. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2023-24 school year, that students complete a one semester ethnic studies course, in either social studies or English, in order to meet state high school graduation requirements.
- 2) Requires that the courses be based on the ethnic studies required to be developed by current law.
- 3) States that a local educational agency may require a full-year course in ethnic studies at its discretion under its authority to establish local graduation requirements that exceed those of the state.
- 4) Deletes the requirement that a school district or charter school that elects to offer a course of study in ethnic studies offer the course as an elective in the social sciences or English language arts and make the course available in at least one year during a student's enrollment in grades 9 to 12.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes high school graduation requirements, and authorizes school districts to establish additional requirements for graduation.
- 2) Requires the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to develop, and the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt, modify, or revise, a model curriculum in ethnic studies. Requires that, by December 31, 2019, the IQC to submit the model curriculum to the SBE for adoption, and the SBE to adopt the model curriculum by March 31, 2020.
- 3) Requires the model curriculum to be developed with participation from faculty of ethnic studies programs at universities and colleges with ethnic studies programs and a group of representatives of local educational agencies (LEAs).
- 4) Requires that the model curriculum be written as a guide to allow school districts to adapt their courses to reflect the student demographics in their communities, and include examples of courses offered by LEAs that have been approved as meeting A-G admissions requirements including, to the extent possible, course outlines for those courses.
- 5) Requires the IQC to provide a minimum of 45 days for public comment before submitting the model curriculum to the SBE.

- 6) Requires a school district or charter school that elects to offer a course of study in ethnic studies to offer the course as an elective in the social sciences or English language arts and to make the course available in at least one year during a student's enrollment in grades 9 to 12.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

***Need for the bill.*** According to the author's office: "Knowledge of our history plays a critical role in shaping who we become. When I was growing up, the history of those who look like me was not represented in the classroom. As a former Ethnic Studies teacher, I saw firsthand how much more engaged my students were when they saw themselves reflected in the coursework."

California is one of the most diverse states in the country and we should celebrate that diversity by teaching a curriculum that is inclusive of all of our cultures and backgrounds. Ethnic Studies provide students an opportunity to learn about histories outside of the Euro-centric teachings most prominent in our schools. At a time when the national climate drives divisiveness and fear of otherness, Ethnic Studies can play a critical role in increasing awareness and understanding."

***State graduation requirements.*** Current law establishes state high school graduation requirements, including the equivalent of three year-long courses in social studies. These courses must include United States history and geography; world history, culture, and geography; a one-semester course in American government and civics, and a one-semester course in economics. Current law also permits school districts to establish local graduation requirements which exceed those of the state.

Existing law does not require course in ethnic studies for graduation, but does require a school district or charter school that elects to offer a course of study in ethnic studies to offer the course as an elective in the social sciences or English language arts and to make the course available in at least one year during a student's enrollment in grades 9 to 12.

***Status of ethnic studies model curriculum.*** Current law requires the IQC to develop and submit the model curriculum in ethnic studies to the SBE by December 31, 2019, and the SBE to adopt the curriculum by March 31, 2020. This bill requires that the ethnic studies courses required for graduation be aligned to the model curriculum in ethnic studies.

The IQC is holding three Model Curriculum Advisory Committee meetings from February through April of this year. The IQC will then review the draft curriculum and approve it for public review. Public comment will take place from June to August of this year, and the IQC is scheduled to recommend the draft curriculum to the SBE in November of this year. The SBE is scheduled to act on the recommendation between January and March of next year.

In 2018, the SBE adopted the following general principles for the model curriculum:

- Include accurate information based on current and confirmed research;
- When appropriate, be consistent with the content and instructional shifts in the 2016 History–Social Science Framework, in particular the emphasis upon student-based inquiry in instruction
- Promote the values of civic engagement and civic responsibility

- Align to the Literacy Standards for History–Social Studies within the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History–Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, as appropriate
- Promote self and collective empowerment
- Be written in language that is inclusive and supportive of multiple users, including teachers (single and multiple-subject), support staff, administrators, and the community
- Encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together, highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as equality, justice, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, etc.
- Include information on the ethnic studies movement, specifically the Third World Liberation Front, and its significance in the establishment of ethnic studies as a discipline and work in promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education
- Promote critical thinking and rigorous analysis of history, systems of oppression, and the status quo in an effort to generate discussions on futurity, and imagine new possibilities

The SBE also adopted the following principles for the course outlines in the model curriculum:

- Include course outlines that offer a thematic approach to ethnic studies with concepts that provide space for educators to build in examples and case studies from diverse backgrounds
- Include course outlines that allow for ethnic studies to be taught as a stand-alone elective or integrated into an existing course (e.g., sociology, English language arts, and history);
- Include course outlines that allow for local, state-specific, national, and global inquiry into ethnic studies
- Have the capability to engage multiple languages and genealogies
- Engage a range of disciplines beyond traditional history and social sciences, including but not limited to: visual and performing arts, English language arts, economics, biology, gender & sexuality studies, etc.

***Enrollment and course offerings in ethnic studies is increasing, but many social science ethnic studies courses are not A-G approved.*** Ethnic studies courses are taught in different disciplines, most commonly in history-social science and English language arts. The model curriculum under development will provide a framework for courses in both of these disciplines.

As of the 2014-15 school year, the Montebello Unified School District offered a history elective called “Mexican American Studies” and an English language arts elective called “African American Literature.” The Oakland Unified School District offered a history-social science elective course titled “African American History,” and Los Angeles Unified School District offered an English language arts course titled “Mexican American Literature.” The San Francisco Unified School District offered a social studies elective called “Asian American History,” a year-long course taught in Chinese titled “Asian American Studies,” as well as a social studies elective titled “Ethnic Studies.”

Enrollment in ethnic studies courses has been growing in recent years, but a significant number are not approved as meeting A-G admissions requirements of the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems, particularly those offered as social science courses. In order for courses to receive approval, course outlines must be submitted to, and approved by, the UC.

In recognition of this problem, the statute authorizing the development of the model curriculum requires that it include examples of courses A-G approved courses, including course outlines for those courses, to the extent feasible.

CDE data on course enrollment and offerings in ethnic studies indicates the following:

- In 2016-17, 17,354 students were enrolled in ethnic studies courses (social science and English language arts combined), up from 8,678 in 2014-15.
- The total above includes 4,662 students enrolled in ethnic studies courses in English language arts, in 210 courses in 82 schools in ethnic studies.
- In 2016-17, 943 ethnic studies courses (social science and English language arts combined) were taught in 555 schools, compared with 696 courses in 177 schools in 2014-15.
- In 2016-17, for ethnic studies courses in social science, 395 of the 777 courses (51%) were approved as meeting A-G admissions requirements.
- In 2016-17, English language arts ethnic studies courses were more likely to be approved, with 166 of 210 (80%) courses approved as meeting A-G admissions requirements.

***Trend toward local ethnic studies graduation requirements.*** Several school districts have recently made completion of a course in ethnic studies a local graduation requirement. Among them are Montebello Unified School District, El Rancho Unified School District, Sacramento City Unified School District, and Coachella Valley Unified School District.

***Ethnic studies course outlined in History-Social Science framework.*** The History-Social Science Framework adopted by the SBE in 2017 describes high school elective courses in ethnic studies as follows:

Ethnic studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses many subject areas including history, literature, economics, sociology, and political science, among others. In this course, students focus on an in-depth comparative study of the history, politics, culture, contributions, challenges, and current status of ethnic groups in the United States. It is also important for students to learn the national origins of ethnic groups and their transnational linkages. In Ethnic Studies, students examine the process of racial and ethnic formation of ethnic minorities in a variety of contexts: political, legal, social, historical, economic, and cultural. The course concentrates, to a great extent, on the experiences of various ethnic minorities in the United States and the ways in which their experiences were impacted by the issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and the interaction among different ethnic groups. Students will also address how individuals within specific ethnic groups think and feel about themselves and their group as it can be represented by literature, memoirs, art, and music. To understand ethnic identity in their local communities, students can volunteer with local community organizations and centers that serve specific ethnic populations.

***Research on academic value of ethnic studies.*** A review by the National Education Association found that “there is considerable research evidence that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students.” Another recent analysis found “a consistent, significant, positive relationship between [Mexican American Studies] participation and student academic performance.”

A 2016 study from Stanford University (published as a working paper) on the effects of an ethnic studies curriculum piloted in several San Francisco Unified School District high schools found

that assignment to a year-long 9<sup>th</sup> grade ethnic studies course was associated with an increase of ninth-grade student attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23. The authors conclude that “these surprisingly large effects are consistent with the hypothesis that the course reduced dropout rates and suggest that culturally relevant teaching, when implemented in a supportive, high-fidelity context, can provide effective support to at-risk students.” They also note, “the implementation of ethnic studies in SFUSD was, arguably, conducted with a high degree of fidelity, forethought, and planning. In particular, it appeared to draw upon the work of a core group of dedicated teachers, engaging in a regular professional learning community, with outside support from experts in the subject to create and sustain the program. As scholars from a number of disciplines have noted, the effects of such smaller-scale interventions are often very different when the same policies are implemented at scale.”

***How to count the ethnic studies requirement?*** The California School Boards Association writes, “One concern is potential confusion on how to count the ethnic studies course toward state graduation requirements. Current law requires completion of three courses in English language arts and three courses in history-social science. It is unclear whether the ethnic studies requirement could be met concurrently through enrollment in courses which also met the English language arts or history-social science requirements. CSBA would request an amendment to clarify that students taking the ethnic studies course meet both the ethnic studies requirement and the English/social studies requirement, depending upon how the course is integrated into the curriculum at the local level.”

***Recommended amendments.*** *Staff recommends that the bill be amended* as follows:

- 1) Move the implementation date forward to the 2024-25 school year, consistent with the implementation timeline in AB 2772 of the 2017-18 Session, as passed by this Committee.
- 2) State that the graduation requirement may be met through completion of a stand-alone ethnic studies elective course, or through completion of a course required to meet a graduation requirement in another subject, provided that the course is based on the ethnic studies model curriculum adopted by the SBE. For example, if a student takes a course ethnic studies literature course called Mexican American Literature, the student could meet both the ethnic studies course requirement and earn a credit for a course in English language arts (a subject required for graduation), provided that the ethnic studies content is based on the model curriculum. As noted above, the ethnic studies model curriculum under development will include course outlines that allow for ethnic studies to be taught as a stand-alone elective or integrated into an existing course.
- 3) Permit the required ethnic studies course to be offered in any discipline, not only English language arts and social studies, provided that it is based on the ethnic studies model curriculum. As noted above, the model curriculum will be designed to engage a range of disciplines beyond traditional history and social sciences, including visual and performing arts, English language arts, economics, and gender and sexuality studies.
- 4) Clarify that the ethnic studies course requirement, as well as the other state minimum course requirements for graduation, apply to charter schools.

***Prior legislation.*** AB 2772 (Medina), as passed by this Committee, would have required all students to complete a semester-long social studies or English language arts course in ethnic studies to graduate from high school, based on a state-adopted model curriculum, commencing in the 2023-24 school year. The bill was later amended to establish a grant program, administered

by the CDE, for the purpose of providing funding for courses in ethnic studies in school districts which would make ethnic studies a graduation requirement. This bill was vetoed by Governor Brown, who stated:

School districts already can, and are, requiring ethnic studies for graduation. While I recognize the value of these courses, I am reluctant to encourage yet another graduation requirement, especially when students are already overburdened by multiple tests and endless hours of homework.

AB 1393 (Weber) of this Session would require the IQC to develop and submit to the SBE a model curriculum relative to the history and cultural study of Laotian refugees, as provided, on or before December 31, 2022.

SB 895 (Nguyen), Chapter 686, Statutes of 2018, requires the IQC to develop a model curriculum on the Vietnamese American refugee experience, a model curriculum on the Cambodian genocide, and a model curriculum on Hmong history and culture.

AB 738 (Limon), Chapter 614, Statutes of 2017 requires the development of a model curriculum in Native American studies, and requires school districts which elect to offer one course in Native American studies to make the course available in at least one year during a student's enrollment in grades 9-12.

HR 29 (Weber) of the 2017-18 Session resolves that the state will establish an ethnic studies graduation requirement for all high school pupils.

AB 2016 (Alejo) Chapter 327, Statutes of 2016 requires the development of a model curriculum in ethnic studies, and requires school districts which elect to offer one course in ethnic studies to make the course available in at least one year during a student's enrollment in grades 9-12.

AB 101 (Alejo) of the 2015-16 Session would have required the SPI to oversee the development of a model curriculum in ethnic studies, and would have established an advisory committee on ethnic studies to make recommendations on the development of the curriculum. AB 101 was vetoed by Governor Brown, who stated:

This bill creates what is essentially a redundant process. The Instructional Quality Commission is in the midst of revising the History-Social Science Framework, which includes guidance on ethnic studies courses. Creating yet another advisory body specific to ethnic studies would be duplicative and undermine our current curriculum process.

AB 1750 (Alejo) of the 2013-14 Session would have required the IQC to identify a model curriculum on ethnic studies at the high school level. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2001 (Diaz) of the 2001-02 Session would have required the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission (now the IQC) to identify model programs, standards, and curricula for ethnic studies at the high school level. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, who stated that existing law, teacher training, and curriculum already addressed this topic.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Anti-Defamation League  
California Faculty Association  
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Educated Men with Meaningful Messages  
Fresno International Refugee Ministries  
Vietnamese Youth Development Center  
Several individuals

**Opposition**

None on file

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