

July 7, 2021

**Re: AB 101 (Medina) – Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement – OPPOSE**

Honorable Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Education,

We are **152 university scholars and academics** – including a **Nobel Laureate and 17 Distinguished Professors** - most of us with decades of experience designing and carrying out empirical research and qualified to analyze scholarly publications, who are writing to express our strong opposition to AB 101. **Considered against the backdrop of the catastrophic educational losses and trauma that many California students have experienced as a result of the pandemic, it is irresponsible and unethical to pass a bill requiring students to take a course based on a curriculum that has not been shown to improve students' academic achievement and may in fact add to their trauma.**

Most of us were signatories on letters to the California Department of Education exposing the unsubstantiated and misleading claims that provide the rationale for why school districts should implement the curriculum.

**Comprehensive Analysis of Research Found No Empirical Support for Claims of the Academic Benefits of Ethnic Studies**

Our [first letter](#), sent on January 21, 2021, contained an eight-page analysis of the research cited in the Benefits of Ethnic Studies section of the Introduction to the Third Field Review of the ESMC. Focusing on the overarching claim of the section taken verbatim from a 2011 review article by Christine Sleeter — “There is considerable research evidence that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students” — as well as several other specific claims about the educational benefits of ethnic studies attributed to various research articles, the comprehensive analysis found that ***none of the articles cited in the ESMC provided sufficient evidence for the claims attributed to it.***

Furthermore, we pointed out that our conclusions were corroborated by none other than Thomas Dee and Emily Penner, authors of the most recent study cited in the curriculum, in which they wrote that previous ethnic studies (ES) research “relies on research designs that cannot necessarily support credible causal inference” and concluded that “the theoretical arguments and public enthusiasm for ES curricula have not been matched by convincing quantity evidence on their efficacy.” The researchers even cautioned against attempts at “scaling up and replicating” the ethnic studies course they themselves had investigated, noting that “the effects of such smaller-scale interventions are often very different when the same policies are implemented at scale.” Nevertheless, the ESMC ignored Dee and Penner’s plea for caution, exaggerating the researchers’ very modest and somewhat confounding results - that students hovering slightly below a 2.0 GPA who were encouraged to take an ethnic studies course improved their GPAs compared to students slightly above a 2.0 GPA who were *not* encouraged to take the course (while students who were encouraged to take the course but did not do so similarly improved their academic scores, and students who took the course but were not encouraged to do so did not gain academically) - to support the ESMC’s sweeping claim that ethnic studies courses increase student GPAs, especially in math and science.

**False Claims about Academic Benefits of Ethnic Studies Used to Promote Highly Politicized, Divisive 'Critical' Ethnic Studies Classes that Will Incite Hatred and Bigotry in CA Classrooms**

Our [second letter](#), sent on March 4, was a response to a petition addressed to Superintendent Thurmond that was organized by Christine Sleeter, author of the ESMC's central claim that ethnic studies courses result in "positive academic and social outcomes for students." The petition itself acknowledges the lack of robust empirical research on the academic benefits of ethnic studies, but astonishingly argues that these empirically unsubstantiated claims should continue to serve as justification for not only teaching "critical" ethnic studies courses, but for requiring students to take such courses. In our letter we noted that besides providing a major rationale for the ESMC itself, **Sleeter's unsubstantiated 2011 claim has served as the rationale for the promotion of almost every piece of public policy regarding the teaching of ethnic studies in California schools, including AB 2016, AB 1460 and AB 331.**

We also stressed the bad faith of the activist-educators who knowingly promulgate **false claims about the academic benefits of ethnic studies** in order to ensure that the highly politicized and controversial version of the discipline known as Critical Ethnic Studies — a version that many Californians believe is extremely divisive, will promote hatred and bigotry in CA classrooms, and is wholly inappropriate for K-12 students — will be taught in California classrooms.

Unfortunately, in March the State Board of Education unanimously approved an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that retained every one of the wholly unsubstantiated claims about the educational benefits of ethnic studies courses. In addition, several SBE members and a CDE official alarmingly confirmed that the final curriculum is firmly rooted in Critical Ethnic Studies.

**CA Students Have Suffered Catastrophic Learning Losses and Should Not Be Forced to Take a Course with No Proven Academic Benefit that Will Likely Further Traumatize Them**

As you well know, the pandemic has been responsible for a catastrophic loss of instruction for millions of K-12 students in the state. One [study](#) by researchers at Stanford University found that during the early stages of the pandemic, children lost an average of 116 days of reading time and 215 days of math work, and that recovery from these losses could take years. **In light of the pandemic's drastic reversal of students' academic achievement, it is irresponsible and unethical to pass a bill requiring students to take a course based on a curriculum that has not been shown to improve students' academic achievement and may in fact add to their trauma.**

**We therefore urge you to vote NO on AB 101.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned 152 University Scholars and Academics:

*[Names removed from online version]*