



Ethnic Studies Courses Should be Able to Fulfill Required Social Studies Credits

**TLEEC Testimony on HB 45: Relating to ethnic studies instruction in public schools
Submitted to the House Public Education Committee, Tuesday, May 9, 2023**

Dear Chairman Buckley and honorable members of the House Public Education Committee,

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 30 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum and instructional practices, and bilingual education for emergent bilingual students, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

My name is Janeva Wilson, and I am presenting this testimony on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition. I am a graduate student studying education policy and am pursuing my degree to advocate for legislation that supports the academic and social development of racial minority students in public education.

I am writing in favor of HB 45. This bill is a step in the right direction of acknowledging the existence, accomplishments, and contributions of Mexican American and African American people. Allowing ethnic studies to fulfill required social studies credits shows Mexican American and Black students that their identities are valued, included and appreciated. Ethnic studies courses are positively related to student identity and achievement (Sleeter & Zavala, 2021). Additionally, ethnic studies courses are correlated with higher graduation rates and college enrollment (Bonilla, et al., 2021). Thus, social studies requirements should include such an enriching and beneficial course.

During my K12 education, ethnic studies courses were not available to me. As a Black girl, I can personally speak to the feeling of having to learn from a curriculum that left out the experiences of those who looked like me. I questioned why I never learned about the role of Black Americans in shaping and advancing America into the country we know it to be today. I felt saddened, lost and confused to call myself an American, but only be familiar with the history of Americans of a white complexion. The America I saw around me was full of diversity, yet the curriculum I knew did not include that. It was disheartening to realize that the history, perspectives and experiences of my ancestors were not a part of the required curriculum. Ethnic studies should be allowed to count as more than an elective.

Representation matters, especially in a state where over 50% of citizens are people of color. School curricula should provide students with the opportunity to learn about their predecessors, which can inspire the youth to pursue their wildest dreams. Furthermore, it is imperative that legislation exists to foster positive racial identity and a sense of belonging to students who have been historically underserved by the public education system. HB 45 embodies the spirit of inclusion that so many students deserve. I implore this committee to

advance this bill and show your commitment to Texas students. Mexican American studies are a part of American history. African American studies are a part of American history. Texas' curriculum and standards should support and honor that in every way possible.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org), or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).

References

- Bonilla, S., Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2021). Ethnic Studies Increases Longer-Run Academic Engagement and Attainment. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 1-10. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2026386118>
- Sleeter, C.E., & Zavala, M. (2021). What the Research Says About Ethnic Studies. *Transforming Multicultural Education Policy And Practice: Expanding Educational Opportunity*, 1-32. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/What%20the%20Research%20Says%20About%20Ethnic%20Studies.pdf>

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state, and national levels.

TLEEC Member Organizations

ARISE Adelante	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)
Austin Justice Coalition	– Tejas Foco
Breakthrough Central Texas	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Children at Risk	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Educators in Solidarity	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin
Every Texan	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) Measure	Texas NAACP
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	The Arc of Texas
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	The Education Trust in Texas
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)	
