



November 9, 2019

**Re: Texas State Board of Education Public Hearing on Proposed New African American Studies Course**  
**Date of Hearing: November 13, 2019**  
**Committee of the Full Board, Agenda Item Number 2**

Dear Members of the Texas State Board of Education:

The undersigned organizations form the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), formerly called the Texas Latino Education Coalition. TLEEC and each of its member organizations focus on ensuring that all students have access to excellent educational opportunities with courses that honor and accurately portray the role that individuals and communities of color have played in our collective history.

We write to urge SBOE members to adopt the proposed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for an African American Studies course.

As the Board is aware, the proposed African American Studies course would be the second in the Texas Ethnic Studies course catalog. The first course, *Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies*, was an important addition to the Texas public school instruction options, and its adoption in 2018 made our state a leader in the country.<sup>1</sup> The Mexican American Studies course is taught in schools across the state,<sup>2</sup> giving Texas students a more accurate, richer academic experience. As the course was being discussed, TLEEC joined scores of advocates, including families and students, to push for the adoption of the course. Then, and now, we pointed to the clear benefits of culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy, including related increases in standardized test scores and high school graduation rates among students who took Mexican American Studies courses.<sup>3</sup> When students are able to make connections between their own communities and the content taught in their schools, they are better able to develop critical thinking skills and an academic identity, making instruction more relevant and impactful.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is believed that *Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies* was the first Mexican American Studies course approved by a state board of education in the country. See <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/news-releases/sboe-news/sboe-gives-final-approval-ethnic-studies>

<sup>2</sup> See Mexican American Studies Course Locator Map (produced by the Intercultural Development Research Association) available at <https://idra.news/MASmap>.

<sup>3</sup> Nolan L. Cabrera, et al., "Missing the (Student Achievement) Forest for All the (Political) Trees," *American Education Research Journal*, 2014: <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/51/6/1084>.

<sup>4</sup> See Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>.

The proposed African American Studies course can have the same positive impact for Texas students, particularly the many African American students who will finally have access to a state-approved course that delves into their history and the many cultural, academic, political, scientific, and social contributions of African American people. The course, already offered at 23 campuses in Dallas ISD, would also benefit all other students who may not otherwise be exposed to instruction focused on African American experiences.

Additionally, approving the proposed TEKS for African American Studies will make it easier for educators across the state who are already attempting to incorporate African American studies into their instruction, to have reliable curriculum standards and access to resources.

The adoption of the proposed TEKS standards for an African American Studies course is an essential step in developing a more true, accurate, and affirming academic experience for a Texas public school population that is growing more diverse each year. The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition urges members of the State Board of Education to adopt the proposed TEKS standards for a new African American Studies course and to continue to engage with communities across the state regarding appropriate and accurate course content and instructional materials, including textbooks. Please feel free to reach out to any of the undersigned organizations—we look forward to supporting efforts to improve instructional content and practice in Texas schools.

Sincerely,

Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition

César E. Chávez Legacy and Educational Foundation | Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) | Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum | Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) | McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership | Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) | Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA) | National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco | San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | Texas American Federation of Teachers | Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) | Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE) | Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC) | Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas – Austin | Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE) | Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) | Texas NAACP | UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)