



Ethnic Studies Programs Promote Improvements in Student Outcomes, Especially for Students of Color

TLEEC Testimony for House Bill 1504, Submitted to House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton, Vice Chair Lozano, and Honorable Members of the House Public Education Committee:

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 20 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 English learners, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

TLEEC supports House Bill 1504 because of its potential for positive impact on outcomes for students, especially students of color, in allowing ethnic studies courses to count toward high school graduation requirements.

A well-established body of research underpins the case for ethnic studies. Positive impacts extend across multiple outcomes, including increased academic achievement, improved attendance and higher grades. These impacts span all grade levels in ethnic studies programs centering indigenous studies, Mexican American Studies, or African American Studies.¹ More specific research points to improved performance and a decreased probability of dropping out of high school for students that identify as Hispanic.² In short, ethnic studies programs support our statewide goals for greater graduation rates and postsecondary achievement.

Ethnic studies could particularly benefit graduation rates for emergent bilingual students (“English learners”). Students learning a second language experience greater success when teachers both “recognize students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and incorporate elements of students’ cultures into their pedagogy and teaching”³ – practices that are integral to well-developed ethnic studies programs. House Bill 1504 provides Texas with the opportunity to extend these benefits to emerging bilingual students throughout the state.

TLEEC makes the following recommendations:

- Support HB 1504 and the addition of Mexican American Studies and African American Studies courses to count toward high school graduation requirements; and

¹ Sleeter, C.E., & Zavala, M. (2020). *What the Research Says About Ethnic Studies*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/what-research-says-about-ethnic-studies>

² Dee, T.S., & Penner, E.K. (2017). The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1), 127-166. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312.16677002>

³ Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Education: A Synthesis of Research Across Content Areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 163-206. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>

- Support the creation and addition of other ethnic studies courses, such as Indigenous Studies and Asian American Studies.

The growing proportion of students of color and emerging bilingual students in Texas public schools adds urgency to calls for statewide implementation of ethnic studies, but this growth is not the only reason for such calls. Our students deserve an education that highlights the totality of their schooling and life experience. This includes uplifting the knowledge students possess through family, community and cultural histories.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Ana Ramón (ana.ramon@idra.org) or Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes (chloe.sikes@idra.org) at IDRA, or Fátima Menéndez, J.D., at MALDEF (fmenendez@maldef.org).

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	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Easterseals Central Texas	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)
Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)	Texas NAACP
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	The Education Trust
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA)	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco	
San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	