



Adopt HB 3638 to Establish an African American Studies Advisory Board

IDRA Testimony for HB 3638, Presented by Dr. Altheria Caldera to the House Public Education Committee, April 13, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and the Honorable Members of the House Public Education Committee:

I am Dr. Altheria Caldera, and I am an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA, and we are in support of HB 3638. IDRA is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. A critical part of college preparation includes ensuring all students have access to culturally-sustaining educational practices, including ethnic studies courses in their schools.

HB 3638 proposes establishment of a 15-member African American Studies advisory board by the State Board of Education. The proper implementation of African American Studies made possible through this council will benefit Texas students and improve the accuracy of Texas social studies curricula.

An advisory board composed of professionals and advocates, including parents and students, with expertise in the discipline of African American Studies is needed to ensure that the African American Studies course, general social studies courses, and other courses with African American content are designed and implemented with fidelity.

In an article, "The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society," LaGarrett King reported: "The issue with Black history now is not simply the need to increase Black representation in the curriculum. Instead, we should ask how we can truly represent Black history in more humanizing ways" (2017). HB3638's proposed African American Studies advisory board would guide the State Board of Education in this "how."

IDRA helped facilitate a similar board in Virginia to create a more meaningful and culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy that accurately portrays the history, struggles and triumphs of African Americans in the commonwealth's history and social science courses. The work of that advisory board was critical to strengthening standards and coursework in the state, and we hope Texas will join Virginia by convening the proposed advisory board to consider how schools can ensure culturally-sustaining educational practices that benefit all students.

If you are questioning if such an advisory board is *really* necessary, consider the following egregious actions that have occurred in the teaching of African American history and culture.

- A McGraw-Hill textbook, used here in Texas in 2015, called enslaved Africans “workers” and characterized them as immigrants.
- In 2019, in an attempt teach students about slavery, a New York teacher held a mock slave auction.
- A Wisconsin teacher in February 2021 asked her students hypothetically how they would punish a slave.
- Just a few weeks ago, a Delaware teacher had her students do yoga poses to recreate what Africans who had been captured to be enslaved experienced as ship cargo.
- In a content analysis of textbooks, published in 2020, researchers concluded that “Black people are involved in actions with low agency and power” (Lucy, et al., 2020, p. 14).

To prevent these types of educational malpractice, the African American Studies advisory board will assist the State Board of Education in preventing the trivialization of Black suffering, the dehumanization of Black bodies and the marginalization of Black contributions. Importantly, too, the advisory board of experts as outlined by the committee substitute, will be equipped to make recommendations that do not show concession to any pressure to glamorize the Black experience in America or to tokenize a few successful African Americans as examples of diversity and inclusivity.

The board will have the opportunity to guarantee that the course and materials are not rooted in deficit ideology and to verify the criticality of the course by recommending curricula that do not silence Black dissent reflected through socio-political movements for civil rights. Last, the council could confirm that the course elevates voices that reflect not only Black suffering and struggle, but also Black joy and achievement.

For these reasons, it is crucial that a board be appointed to provide expertise, guidance and insight on the development and implementation of the African American Studies course, general social studies courses, and other courses with African American content. If HB 3638 is adopted, Texas will join several other states in establishing an advisory committee to perform this important work.

In sum, members of Texas’ advisory board will offer the insight and perspectives necessary to make certain course content and materials:

- are historically accurate,
- are thorough in their presentation of African American history and culture,
- showcase the strengths and richness of African American history and culture, and
- are critical of the systems and policies that have led to the victimization of Black citizens.

Recommendations

IDRA recommends the committee adopts the substitute for HB 3638.

I appreciate this opportunity and thank Rep. Johnson for bringing the bill. IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

- Craven, M. (2019). African American Studies Course Will Have a Significant and Positive Impact on Students Across Texas, testimony. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association. <https://idra.news/SBOEmc111319>
- IDRA. (October 28, 2019). IDRA EAC- South Assists Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association. <https://idra.news/VAcmsn19>
- King, L.J. (2017). The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society. Social Education. https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_810117014.pdf
- Li, L., Demszky, D., Bromley, P., & Jurafsky, D. (2020). Content Analysis of Textbooks via Natural Language Processing: Findings on Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in Texas U.S. History Textbooks. DOI:10.1177/2332858420940312

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