

5 Tips

for Organizing a High School Student-Led Ethnic Studies Advocacy Group



The tips here are designed for a student or team of students who are already ethnic studies advocates and who respect and value student opinion. This young person or team should be part of a peer group that gives mutual support and encouragement.

1

Identify three to five students...

who are either in an ethnic studies class, took one previously or are interested in the topic even though they have never had a formal class. The critical mass needed to form a group that can be sustained over time is not dependent on large numbers but rather the quality of the mutual relationships, commitment and persistence of the core group. A healthy group might be small for a semester or a year before the numbers increase.



2

Bring them together...

to share their vision, hopes and dreams on the topic. Balance peer listening and speaking leaning toward critical dialogue and critical thinking.

3



Facilitate a conversation...

that results in listing ideas-in-common (use a Venn Diagram).

4

Encourage them to form a group...

to establish goals and develop a short-term plan of action. A teacher advocate can provide non-intrusive mentoring (with special sensitivity to adultism) and a safe meeting place.



5



Consider possible initial group tasks...

- ✓ **Name the group.** Don't spend too much time in a naming exercise. Clever or cute names are OK but don't contribute much to the depth and impact of the group. The conversation (sometimes debate) about the most acceptable label is important but should not slow down or diminish the organizing efforts.
- ✓ **Set goals in writing.** These will become the core of a flier or brochure or an online infographic for the group. The initial brainstorm list can be refined over time as the group evolves.
- ✓ **Establish a leadership model that is collaborative and rotating.** Traditional officers elected by the group are OK but not ideal. Try to have leadership tasks shared and rotated. Be aware of charismatic or energetic individuals who might control and become gatekeepers even though in the short term seem to be effective spokespersons. An effective youth advocacy group should not mirror the traditional school organizations but instead be a flexible, lean-and-mean team that takes meaningful and impactful actions.
- ✓ **Identify opportunities for outreach,** selling and inviting to join.
- ✓ **Develop a peer outreach plan.** Be cautious about relationships, collaborations and networks so that you keep your original goals. Some other peer groups might have broader or different goals even when there is overlap with yours. Consider the important task your group went through in identifying the common goals so assure yourselves that other coalition members have those same common goals, and you can join in activities that are focused on the common goals.
- ✓ **Agree on a communication plan** with similar and partner groups in other schools and school districts
- ✓ **Carry out activities that result in collective action,** e.g., presenting a recommended policy statement to a school board.
- ✓ **Use social media strategically,** carefully and with specific project goals.

