

An Overview and Evaluation of Critical Ethnic Studies in Saint Paul Public Schools

Mouakong Vue, Saint Paul Public Schools
Xue Xiong, Saint Paul Public Schools
Alyssa Parr, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement
Jacob Oertel, University of Minnesota
Keith Mayes, University of Minnesota
Nxtheb Chang, Youth Leadership Initiative

Abstract

Drawing on the experiences of K-12 practitioners and data from a mixed-methods evaluation, this article provides an overview and analysis of the district-wide implementation of a Critical Ethnic Studies course in Saint Paul Public Schools. The article connects the pedagogical training and approaches used by educators with specific student learning outcomes, as well as progress towards broader institutional transformation. These outcomes include students' increased understanding of core principles such as critical consciousness, self-love, and community, as well as teachers' increased comfort with pedagogical approaches requiring them to reflect on their own positionality and uplift students as holders of knowledge. The article provides insights into the large-scale implementation of a challenging new course and pedagogy and argues that the success of any ethnic studies program is contingent on broad-based collaboration which includes both student and community voices. Policies requiring the teaching of ethnic studies cannot produce sustainable implementation without consistent investment in teacher support and community-building initiatives.

Keywords: Evaluation, Implementation, K-12 Ethnic Studies

The teaching of ethnic studies in Minnesota's K-12 schools has recently overcome major hurdles through ceaseless community organizing, putting Minnesota towards the national forefront of advancing ethnic studies education. The Minnesota legislature passed bill HF 1502 in May 2023, making ethnic studies a requirement for all district and charter high schools students. Beginning in 2026-2027, students will have to take one ethnic studies course that can be counted toward social studies graduation requirements. In 2022-2023, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) first implemented a Critical Ethnic Studies (CES) course district-wide co-designed with students, educators, and community members with minimal guidance and resources from the state. Approximately 2,460 SPPS students enrolled in this course in 2022-2023 and 70 percent of these students successfully completed the course and earned full credit. The course's existence and design are significantly attributable to student advocacy from the district Student Engagement

Advisory Board (SEAB) and, which pushed to center the stories and lived experiences of ethnically marginalized students and communities, teach critical thinking, and help address issues including a lack of diversity in advanced courses, negative effects of Student Resource Officers (SROs) within schools, and poor mental health and accessibility.

During the 2022–2023 academic year, the University of Minnesota’s Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality (RIDGS) Studies and the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) research team conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of the CES course’s inaugural year in order to better understand the course’s success in meeting the needs identified by SEAB as well as to measure teacher readiness to engage with ethnic studies pedagogies (Parr et al., 2023). Our findings suggest that the course implementation was strong and achieved the goals of centering the stories and lived experiences of ethnically marginalized students and communities as well as teaching critical thinking. Additionally, the findings also suggest that administrative support at all levels of the district as well as consistent professional development in ethnic studies pedagogies methodologies are crucial to attaining the desired outcomes. As ethnic studies remains a political target in Minnesota and nationwide, though, educators’ access to administrative support and professional development opportunities wavers.

In this article, we demonstrate that the success of any ethnic studies program is contingent on a broad-based collaboration among teachers, students, administrators, community-based organizations, and scholars of ethnic studies in higher education institutions. For those seeking to build ethnic studies classrooms that embody the spirit of a “living archive” in which “collective and communal perspectives of social, political, economic and cultural life emerge when the archive is imagined as alive and with us, collective and intergenerational, engaged and embodied” (Joubert, 2023, p. 9), that same spirit must also guide course development and implementation. We demonstrate that schools’ pedagogical approaches must be continually nurtured by community engagement and scholarly expertise that hold K-12 districts accountable for the ethnic studies product they put in front of students. In this article we discuss the roots of the CES course, the ways in which teachers prepared for it, the results of our evaluation, and the implications of our findings for district and statewide policy and practice. We show how pedagogical priorities in SPPS’ ethnic studies course are tethered to the use of data in ongoing revision and evaluation and that collaboration with a cross-section of stakeholders must permanently remain part of the enterprise to ensure its success. In uplifting the strategies, successes, and setbacks of implementing Critical Ethnic Studies in SPPS, we hope that several of these components can serve as models for other school districts seeking a pathway towards ethnic studies.

Advocacy Roots

Saint Paul Public Schools is a K-12 public school district in the capital city of Minnesota. It is the second-largest district in the state and the majority of its students identify as people of color—3.1% American Indian, 28.8% Asian, 23.7% Black or African American, 14.3% Hispanic or Latino, 22.6% White, 7.5% two or more races (Minnesota Report Card, 2024; Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2024). Since the 1980s, SPPS has offered a handful of ethnic studies and/or multicultural courses centered around the histories and cultures of specific communities, such as African American Studies or Asian American Studies. These courses have shifted over time due to inconsistent course offerings at only a few high schools and teachers acting on their own initiative, with little to no professional development or administrative support. Some former students,

including one who took an African American Studies course in SPPS in the mid-1990s and later became a school principal, have powerful memories of the impact the course had on their life trajectories, with a special fondness for the hunger for knowledge that both the students and teacher brought to the course. It is also important to remember and research past grassroots movements for educational change in Minnesota such as the Heart of the Earth Survival School, which operated from 1971 to 2008 (Lurie, 2020), and The Institute of African Learning in the 1970s (Rickford, 2016). The legacies of both schools are echoed today by the Academia Cesar Chavez and the Hmong College Prep Academy, among others.

Seeking to overcome barriers to access and to ensure that all SPPS communities are represented in the curriculum, SPPS students have continually been at the center of the struggle to forge a mandatory, well-funded, and well-supported ethnic studies program. Specifically, the Student Engagement and Advancement Board (SEAB) was at the vanguard of cross-system reform. SEAB was founded in 2015, when student representatives from five SPPS high schools joined forces to advocate for a multiplatform agenda including substantive revisions of preexisting social studies, ESL, and other curricula to center the histories of people of color. SEAB members saw their mission as “not to speak for students, but to develop and implement strategies that amplify student voice” (SEAB, 2019). SEAB was also officially recognized via vote by the SPPS School Board, which sought to integrate student voices into district-level decisions. Several Board members deliberately created space for SEAB to share their experiences and consulted with SEAB members to craft proposals.

Since the program’s inception, SEAB members have spoken with SPPS teachers, staff, and administrative leaders about their experiences in the classroom, including painful interpersonal interactions with teachers and observations of their communities’ erasure from the curriculum. They also conducted several surveys amongst SPPS students attesting to widespread demand for a regular ethnic studies course. In a 2019 presentation to the Board of Education, SEAB recommended that SPPS develop a Critical Ethnic Studies course, make it a graduation requirement, hire dedicated staff, include student and community voices, and eventually expand CES to middle and elementary schools (Saint Paul Public Schools Board, 2019).

Through SEAB’s advocacy, two Ethnic Studies Coordinator roles were created to help build the infrastructure of developing and supporting the new Critical Ethnic Studies course. The course was developed through research of other Ethnic Studies K-12 programming across the country (Indiana Department of Education, 2020; Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017; New Haven School District, n.d.; Oakland Unified School District, 2019; Oregon Department of Education, 2020; San Francisco Unified School District, n.d.; Stockton Unified School District, 2022) as well as additional ethnic studies resources (California Department of Education, 2021; Cuauhtin et al., 2019; Liberated Ethnic Studies, 2024; Minnesota Social Studies Standards, 2024; UCLA History/Geography Project, n.d.; Teaching Tolerance, 2018). SEAB students, as well as several community members including college faculty, local nonprofit workers and organizers, and elders, were invited to and attended planning meetings and contributed ideas as to how the course could address students’ developmental needs and provide students with actionable examples of how to use ethnic studies teaching in their everyday lives. The result was a robust and adaptable framework for a one-semester interdisciplinary course that “examines students’ identity, heritage, culture and communities in relation to various power structures, forms of oppression and

inequalities that have an impact on their lives” (Saint Paul Public Schools Ethnic Studies Department, 2023).

Pedagogical Groundings

Ahead of and during the 2023–2024 school year, the Ethnic Studies Department implemented a new training program for CES teachers, based on the teacher feedback during the pilot year, consultations with faculty, and input from community partners. Drawing on examples from Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2015), SPPS CES coordinators facilitated sessions in which teachers familiarized themselves with student-led ethnic studies movements (including SEAB), considered their own positionality in their classrooms, and collectively discussed how culturally responsive pedagogy’s emphasis on “de-essentializing ethnic identities and subjectivities” (p. 113) could be applied in their own classrooms. Emphasis was placed on the interdisciplinarity of the course, and teachers were given guidance on how to highlight counter-narratives and make the classroom a space where both students and teachers can connect curriculum to their own ancestral roots. These practices are reminiscent of what Joubert (2023) calls “re-remembering” (p. 7), in which classroom participants use stories and art to make histories come alive to themselves and their peers in the present day. Each month, CES educators participated in a professional development cohort to review curriculum and data to further develop the course and practice pedagogy.

These meetings were foregrounded by intensive professional development opportunities in a five-day summer institute—an in-house training that collaborated with local ethnic studies practitioners, advocates, students, faculty, and community representatives. CES staff were informed by the Critical Professional Development framework, which “centers needs and perspectives of students, communities, and teachers and engages teachers in dialectical processes to harness their critical consciousness and hone their critical pedagogy for the broader goal of social justice” (Sacramento, 2019, p. 169). Teachers participated in workshop sessions on restorative practices, ethnic studies legislation, culturally responsive pedagogy, complicating traditional social studies curriculum, and community cultural wealth (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Valdez, 2018; Yosso, 2005). Approximately 50% of CES teachers identified as people of color, and 50% as white, with the ratio varying between 50-50 and 30-70 POC-white since the inaugural year. Since educators held a wide range of ethnic studies experience, coordinators attempted to model the institute itself after a CES classroom, with a special emphasis on treating all participants as holders of valuable knowledge rather than deficits and considering how teachers’ unique standpoints could inform praxis (Fernández, 2019).

The institute dedicated two days to a unique community externship program, designed to bring educators into community spaces, encourage them to engage as listeners and learners, and foster relationships that last beyond the formal program. The externship was inspired by the need to “provide educational opportunities by connecting marginalized students’ lived experiences and community to their school learning . . . [and connect] them to relevant advocacy, organizing, and activism efforts surrounding their communities” (Nojan, 2020, p. 26). These partnerships built the foundations for future CES course field trips and capstone projects. After these visits, teachers processed their experiences together and planned classroom activities based on their learning.

Prior to and during the evaluation discussed in this article, the Ethnic Studies Department integrated multiple channels for feedback and data gathering during the pilot and full inaugural

year implementation of the CES course, including feedback forms and surveys for students, teachers, and community members, and the creation of a Course Development Team composed of SEAB alum students, teachers, community members, and collegiate-level Ethnic Studies practitioners. The team co-constructed the curriculum while taking into consideration survey results and additional feedback from students and teachers.

Evaluation Goals and Methodology

The motivation for conducting a thorough, districtwide evaluation of the SPPS CES course was multifaceted. Through feedback amassed by the Course Development Team, SPPS staff implementing CES across the district during its inaugural year were confident that educators were sufficiently equipped with the curricular and pedagogical foundations of the course, but were also cognizant of the varied classroom contexts, levels of administrative support, and potential for difficulties to arise across schools. They also understood that even in classes dedicated to providing access to culturally affirming knowledge, the continued presence of racialized power relations in schools can make the classroom a site for the reproduction of those power relations (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Oto & Chikkatur, 2019). A primary purpose of this study was to capture and uplift the voices of the students and teachers attempting to co-create a transformative classroom space as envisioned by SEAB and the Ethnic Studies Advisory Board. We use this data to gain an understanding of the pedagogical and curricular components of the course which help students and teachers build the CES classroom and learn the Seven Core Principles as well as to develop recommendations for how the course can be more effective at these goals during future years of its implementation.

Additionally, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the impacts of K-12 ethnic studies courses. This evaluation is the first of its kind in Minnesota, and is informed by decades of prior research from other regions. Perhaps the first most comprehensive review of literature on ethnic studies courses is Sleeter's (2011) piece summarizing the academic and social benefits of ethnic studies at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Sleeter found that students experienced positive academic and social outcomes from participating in ethnic studies courses. For example, students who took ethnic studies courses were more engaged academically, had higher academic achievement, felt personally empowered, and had a greater understanding of and appreciation for the backgrounds of other students.

Researchers have also explored ethnic studies curricula. In fact, Sleeter and Zavala (2020) found that most of the curricula they reviewed were grounded in the knowledges and perspectives of racially marginalized groups, which is central to ethnic studies. Less consistent, however, was attention to criticality, reclaiming cultural identities, intersectionality and multiplicity, positioning students as intellectuals, and community engagement, despite the importance of such approaches to the pedagogy of ethnic studies (de Los Ríos et al., 2015; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Furthermore, Sacramento (2019) recently highlighted the importance of critical professional development, financial support, and course release time in supporting teachers of ethnic studies courses. These studies offer valuable insights into the benefits and successful implementation of ethnic studies courses in K-12 education systems. However, much of that research has taken place in the southwestern United States. Additional research and evaluation is needed to further our understanding of ethnic studies as it is expanded in K-12 education systems in other regions, such as the Midwestern United States.

The research team was composed of two ethnic studies practitioners who have been deeply embedded in the course implementation process and helped identify the most pressing data needs to inform the future development of the course. Additionally, three researchers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) contributed to the design and methodology planning of the evaluation and conducted the bulk of the data gathering. Faculty and staff from the University of Minnesota's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality (RIDGS) Studies also helped ground the evaluation in ethnic studies methodologies and provided logistical support.

The collaborative nature of the research team was especially important given the varied audiences for the evaluation. Primarily, the evaluation and report were created to help ethnic studies practitioners within SPPS, as well as those from other districts seeking guidance on implementing their own programs, better understand the course implementation and students' and teachers' experiences. Additionally, the team was cognizant of the potential external audiences who might use the evaluation data to inform broader policy relating to K-12 ethnic studies, such as district leaders at SPPS and state legislators. In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of ethnic studies, the research team sought to design a mixed-methods approach in order to include the fullest expression of students' and teachers' voices possible with the resources available. While the CES coordinators regularly collected information about the implementation of the course via the Course Development team, student and community surveys and feedback forms, and creating intentional spaces for sharing such as Family Forums and a Student Showcase event, this study was designed to uplift that qualitative information as well as to gather district-wide quantitative information. With these considerations in mind, the team designed a mixed-methods approach with evaluation activities including:

- 1) interviewing former student advocates;
- 2) reviewing the CES curriculum;
- 3) observing Professional Development workshops, SPPS Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee meetings, Teacher Cohort meetings, Family Forums, and a Student Showcase;
- 4) surveying teachers and students district-wide; and
- 5) conducting case studies at two sites through interviews with administrators, teachers, and students.

Data were analyzed descriptively using descriptive statistics and data visualizations for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Quantitative and qualitative findings were then integrated to understand the implementation and experience of CES in SPPS. This approach centered student and teacher voices to help understand the experience of participating in or teaching CES at SPPS during the 2022–2023 school year. Through this approach, we attended to how SPPS and RIDGS would use the data (Utilization-Focused Evaluation; Patton, 2011), the evolving nature of the programming (Developmental Evaluation; Patton, 2010), and the course roots in identity development and the potential of the course to be transformative for students, teachers, and schools (Transformative Evaluation; Mertens, 2008).

Evaluation Findings

The CES course was anchored in four standards and seven principles. The standards emphasized personal and historical explorations of identities and intersectionalities (S1), contributions of marginalized racial and ethnic groups and individuals (S2), local Minnesota and Twin Cities efforts towards justice and equity (S3), and individuals' responsibilities to work towards healing, transformation, and strengthening of their communities (S4). The seven principles of self-love, honor, community, critical consciousness, resistance, hope, and visualization were a centerpiece of the curriculum, providing a lens for teachers and students to understand and engage in CES both within and outside the classroom. Among the most salient principles for SPPS teachers and students were critical consciousness, self-love, and community (Parr et al., 2023, p. 20). In addition to incorporating the seven principles into CES lessons, teachers sought to model the seven principles on a regular basis to reinforce students' learning. These were valuable learning opportunities for students that helped them feel affirmed and grow both personally and academically as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Lessons on **critical consciousness** focused on the histories of oppressed communities, power, and how oppression shows up today. These lessons' approach to oppression were informed by a critical approach to ethnic studies defined by Robin D.G. Kelley as studying "the structures that produce premature death, that make us vulnerable; the ideologies that both invent Blackness and render Black people less than human; and, perhaps most important, the struggle to secure a different future" (Taylor, 2023). Teachers modeled critical consciousness by "work[ing] hard to publicly ask deeper questions and challenge dominant narratives," "pushing back on and encouraging students to question dominant narratives," as well as "personal reflection and questioning" (Parr et al., 2023, p. 20). This taught students how to be aware, question, recognize oppression/inequities in systems and seek to change them, and not "just accept information just as it is." Students also saw connections between critical consciousness and resistance, as one student described: "I have learned that Critical Consciousness allows us to actively demonstrate resistance to the unequal systems of our society and give us a better understanding of the odds that are against us so that we can bring change to our communities" (Parr et al., 2023, p. 22).

Self-love was taught through activities such as a "journey through [B]lack dance and music" with a community leader, and discussions of "resistance through music and dance" (Parr et al., 2023, p. 19). Teachers modeled self-love by "talking out loud [about] the struggle for self-love and the reality of when [they] feel self love." Through these activities, students learned that self-love means accepting, being proud of, loving, and learning more about yourself. This includes "recognizing one's worth and accepting one's inherent value," seeing your identities, caring for your body and mental health, learning about your community and representing your community, knowing about your ancestry/culture(s), putting yourself first, and appreciating yourself more (Parr et al., 2023, p. 21). One student summarized many of the students' comments about self-love:

developing an understanding of who we are and where we come from, as this is crucial to our personal growth and self-acceptance. It is important to practice self-compassion, forgive ourselves for past mistakes, and focus on our strengths instead of our weaknesses. This means prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries to protect our mental and emotional health. When we love ourselves, we are better equipped to navigate life's challenges and obstacles while maintaining a positive perspective.

Teachers and students collectively learned about **community** by taking time in class to talk about “what makes up their community,” pointing out individual and collective academic successes, and engaging in social-emotional learning (SEL) activities “to help students take a break and pause.” Teachers also modeled community in the CES class by building a strong class culture and as one teacher shared, “I try to model community all the time through communication, food, joy, and laughter with other students, my colleagues, and other acquaintances” (Parr et al., 2023, pp. 19–20). Teachers acknowledged the diversity of students’ communities and helped demonstrate “identity as a relational concept—influenced by place and highly contextual” (Trieu, 2018). Students saw community as present “anywhere whether it be in school or at home” or “our neighborhood, our friend groups” (Parr et al., 2023, p. 21).

Impact on Students’ Lives

Through learning about critical consciousness, self-love, and community, in addition to the other principles of CES, students repeatedly shared that the CES course helped them develop a stronger sense of their identity and improved their skills in communicating their experiences, perspectives, and identities. One teacher described this:

My sense is that for many students; they rarely have had the chance to express their racial, gender, or sexual orientation identity. The opportunity to feel validated about who they are and empowered to be proud of who they are was present in their participation in the class and the written work. I believe student[s] appreciated the process of understanding more about their identity and their relationship to society. (Parr et al., 2023, p. 31)

This, in turn, inspired students to take actions in (Parr et al., 2023, p. 29):

- (a) their personal lives (e.g., going to therapy, connecting to their community more, advocating for themselves, thinking more critically, taking more responsibility to make change, being more open minded, talking with their families and friends, and learning more about social justice, history, oppressed communities, counternarratives, and their own heritage);
- (b) the schools they attend (e.g., making changes at their school, organizing school cultural events, and stopping fights);
- (c) state policy (e.g., getting involved in passing Minnesota’s recent ethnic studies bill); and
- (d) activism (e.g., using their voice and speaking up more and participating in walkouts and protests).

These outcomes are evidence of students’ developing along the journey of what Gloria Anzaldúa terms *conocimiento*: “a shift, a new way of thinking that pushes one to reflect on the self within sociohistorical and political realities” (Serrano et al., 2019). As another teacher said, students “realized that THEY are important and that THEY have a voice in what matters to them” (Parr et al., 2023, p. 31).

Recommendations

Evaluators from CAREI prepared four formal recommendation areas for SPPS ethnic studies practitioners as they continue to offer and develop the CES course (Parr et al., 2023, pp. 42–43).

These include:

- System-wide curricular adjustments, including expanding ethnic studies to a year-long course, incorporating ethnic studies concepts in other courses, and considering adjusting when students take the current CES course, and expanding CES course offerings beyond high school. Some teachers expressed a lack of student maturity at tenth grade and proposed the class be taught at eleventh grade instead, while students expressed that it would have been important to have the course earlier. Existing research suggests that the transition from middle to high school may be an ideal time to introduce ethnic studies (Bonilla et al., 2021; Sacramento, 2019), which could both address student feedback as well as prepare students to approach more advanced content with greater familiarity and emotional maturity. Recent legislation passed by the Minnesota legislature requires that districts offer ethnic studies courses in high schools by 2026 and in elementary and middle schools by 2027 (Verges, 2023). Therefore, SPPS might consider offering a CES course in ninth grade and expanding CES courses to elementary and middle schools, an argument echoed in SEAB's recommendation to the SPPS Board in 2019.
- Course content modifications, including featuring content about a broader range of ethnically marginalized groups, making content more accessible for students learning English, and adding an explicit community-engaged course component.
- Additional supports for teachers, including providing time and space for teachers to explore and build upon the curriculum, as well as to do the deep work required to consciously bring their whole selves and identities into the classroom (Sacramento, 2019; Valdez, 2018). Also, CES teachers would benefit from further guidance and resources for how they can communicate with students' families about CES in culturally responsive ways.
- Future research and/or evaluation. Since this evaluation reflects the first year of the SPPS CES requirement, further research could measure the evolution of teachers' pedagogical practices and comfort teaching the course, the changes in students' experiences in the course, and the longer-term impacts of the course on former students' life and career trajectories.

Discussion

The experience of conducting the research for the report and sharing its key findings in a variety of student, teacher, and parent feedback spaces after its completion raised additional discussions about what supports are needed for CES to remain sustainable in SPPS amidst political and budgetary challenges. The inaugural implementation of CES represented the culmination of a collective effort on the part of students, educators, program staff, and district administrators. This effort must persist if the course is to continue to grow, improve, and truly become a part of the SPPS community landscape, both inside and outside of the classroom. The evaluation highlighted several encouraging developments towards sustainability, such as teachers' increasing comfort with the curriculum, improved pedagogy, a graduation requirement, the creation of student capstone projects, and increased student advocacy. These are evidence of a "living archive" growing within SPPS, of a foundation from which students and teachers alike "nourish and sustain our lives, no less our future educational lives" (Joubert, 2023, p. 7).

However, the evaluation also emphasizes that the success of ethnic studies at SPPS or any district in the United States can be short-lived. As a result of budget cuts in spring 2024, the position of one of the two staff coordinators has been eliminated, severely curtailing the Ethnic Studies

Department's ability to sustain or expand its work. As ethnic studies is implemented across Minnesota, it is important to note that policy is only part of how ethnic studies can be successful in schools. Funding and internal district infrastructures must support bridges and relationships with community organizations, strengthening a culture of collaborative learning inside and outside of the school building. Ultimately, an implementation of K-12 ethnic studies serves as a critical tool in developing responsive solutions to Minnesota's struggle for racial equity (Lozenski & Hamilton, 2020) by remaining sustainable, resisting co-optation, and leaning into how learning happens across and between home, community, school and all the people in those spaces.

Lastly, we wish to highlight once more the most unique and impactful factor in SPPS's implementation of CES: student involvement in decision-making processes in the school and district. In order to create an ethnic studies classroom that is accessible, relevant, and community-centric (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015), along with the policy, training and curriculum that underpins it, students and community must be part of the process from the start and not simply receive the end product for surface level forms of feedback. Districts should be deliberate about putting channels into place which bring student and community voices into the decision-making fold, including the teaching and facilitating of Youth Participatory Action Research (Camarota, 2015). Attention must be paid to ensure that these channels are not restricted by income, language, or access to free time. These steps require deep assessment of power dynamics and decision-making processes, and requires time, funding, and trust. We recommend that each of these components be considered by the Minnesota Department of Education and other entities seeking to create frameworks for the sustainable implementation of K-12 ethnic studies.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Gonzalo Guzmán for his valuable feedback and expertise in helping us analyze the findings of the evaluation.

Additionally, this evaluation was funded in part by the following grants: Minnesota Transform, University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center Research Agenda Grant, Institute for Advanced Study Creative Collaborative Grant.

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*, 118(37), e2026386118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026386118>
- California Department of Education. (2021). *Ethnic studies model curriculum*. California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>
- Camarota, J. (2015). The praxis of ethnic studies: transforming second sight into critical consciousness. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(2), 233–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1041486>
- Critical Ethnic Studies Collective. (2016). *The critical ethnic studies reader*. Duke University Press.
- Cuauhtin, R. T., Zavala, M., Sleeter, C. E., & Au, W. (Eds.). (2019). *Rethinking ethnic studies*. Rethinking Schools.

de Los Ríos, C. V., López, J., & Morrell, E. (2015). Toward a critical pedagogy of race: Ethnic studies and literacies of power in high school classrooms. *Race and Social Problems*, 7(1), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-014-9142-1>

de Novais, J., & Spencer, G. (2018). Learning race to unlearn racism: The effects of ethnic studies course-taking. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 90(6), 860–883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1545498>

Fernández, A. E. (2019). Decolonizing professional development: A re-humanizing approach. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 52(2–3), 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1649610>

HF 1502, 93rd Legislature (2023-2024), 2023 1st Engrossment. (Minn. 2023). https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF1502&session=92&session_number=0&session_year=2023&version=latest

Indiana Department of Education. (2020). *Indiana academic standards: Ethnic studies*. Indiana Department of Education. <https://www.in.gov/doe/files/ethnic-studies-standards-2020.pdf>

Joubert, E. (2023). Editor's introduction: Ethnic studies pedagogies as living archives. *Ethnic Studies Pedagogies*, 1(1), 7–19.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

Liberated Ethnic Studies. (2024). *Model curriculum consortium*. Liberated Ethnic Studies. <https://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/>

Los Angeles Unified School District. (2017). *Guiding principles for ethnic studies and related courses*. Los Angeles Unified School District. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/226/Principles%202017.pdf>

Lozenski, B., & Hamilton, J. (2020, November 2). The time for ethnic studies is now. *MinnPost*. <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2020/11/the-time-for-ethnic-studies-is-now/>

Lurie, J. (2020, July 20). Why the American Indian Movement started the Heart of the Earth Survival School. *MinnPost*. <https://www.minnpost.com/mnopedia/2020/07/why-the-american-indian-movement-started-the-heart-of-the-earth-survival-school/>

Mertens, D. M. (2009). *Transformative research and evaluation*. The Guilford Press.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2024). *2021 Minnesota K-12 academic standards in social studies*. Minnesota Department of Education. <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/soc/>

Minnesota Report Card. (2024). *Demographics*. Minnesota Department of Education. https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--999999000000__groupType--state__year--2024__p--f

Minnesota State Demographic Center. (2024). *School district data*. Minnesota Department of Administration. <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-place/school-district-data.jsp>

New Haven School District. (n.d.). *Ethnic studies standards*. New Haven School District. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E-uKQYLLtU7J4BWWIA-SLaAVjVObwxBs/view>

Nojan, S. (2020). Why ethnic studies? Building critical consciousness among middle school students. *Middle School Journal*, 51(2), 25–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2019.1709259>

Oakland Unified School District. (2019). *OUSD ethnic studies framework 2019-2020*. Oakland Unified School District. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N5eRXYfVfnEZ7SSVVv02mDOy7eE5GvdM/view>

Oregon Department of Education. (2020). *Ethnic studies*. Oregon Department of Education. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/Documents/Ethnic%20Studies%20Webpage%20Communication.pdf>

Oto, R., & Chikkatur, A. (2019). “We didn’t have to go through those barriers”: Culturally affirming learning in a high school affinity group. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 43(2), 145–157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2018.10.001>

Parr, A., Yousuf, E., & Illes, M. (2023). *An evaluation of critical ethnic studies in Saint Paul Public Schools: Year 1 district-wide implementation*. University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. z.umn.edu/CESeval

Patton, M. Q. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. The Guilford Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage.

Rickford, R. J. (2016). *We are an African people: Independent education, black power, and the radical imagination*. Oxford University Press.

Sacramento, J. (2019). Critical collective consciousness: Ethnic studies teachers and professional development. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 52(2–3), 167–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1647806>

Saint Paul Public Schools Board. (2019, February 19). *Mtg. of the board of education 2.19.19 (SEAB) presentation* [Video]. <https://spps.eduvision.tv/directplayer.aspx?q=CT1wecDsedCDb2mJPwUL6p9jQS%252fNr2VlxPWd%252fn585ADv7GppWB72gr%252bJmZQISHI%252b>

Saint Paul Public Schools Board. (2021). *Saint Paul Public Schools policy 510.00*. Saint Paul Public Schools. <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1699023028/sppsorg/jtcxfjbbwyur3ip0aucv/51000graduation-14-21.pdf>

Saint Paul Public Schools Ethnic Studies Department. (2023). *Critical ethnic studies framework in Saint Paul Public Schools*. Saint Paul Public Schools. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h6ZjEBn8hwdJjHdAXPqX-sNbGKx15I2nuE1rMhwgbZ4/edit>

San Francisco Unified School District. (n.d.). *Ethnic studies standards*. San Francisco Unified School District. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UdbAEMBhSQkb9nZqsfHbdPZt20U54nZP/view>

Serrano, T. J., González Ybarra, M., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2017). “Defend yourself with words, with the knowledge that you’ve gained”: An exploration of *conocimiento* among Latina undergraduates in ethnic studies. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(3), 243–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1388238>

Sleeter, C. E. (2011). *The academic and social value of ethnic studies: A research review*. National Education Association Research Department. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521869.pdf>

Sleeter, C. E., & Zavala, M. (2020). What the research says about ethnic studies. In *Transforming multicultural education policy and practice: Expanding educational opportunity* (pp. 1–27). Teachers College Press. <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/what-research-says-about-ethnic-studies>

Stockton Unified School District Ethnic Studies Program. (2022). *High school ethnic studies framework*. Stockton Unified School District. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BxtyyDFKORJrQ8ORT4vOmYpKDuEjygJ9qCll_f3s8yPQ/edit

Student Engagement and Advancement Board (SEAB). (2019). *SEAB member, facilitator & stakeholder manual*. SEAB. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TjNxfBSEyR78TgaP5U50-olwvfmnvpvporLHb0zXxDGvQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Taylor, K. (2023, February 3). The meaning of African American studies. *New Yorker*. <https://www-newyorker-com.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/culture/q-and-a/the-meaning-of-african-american-studies>

Teaching Tolerance. (2018). *Social justice standards: The teaching tolerance anti-bias framework*. The Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/TT-Social-Justice-Standards-Anti-bias-framework-2020.pdf>

Tintiango-Cubales, A., Fernández, A., Concordia, A., Lozenski, B., Hagedorn, C. E., Sokolower, J., Kiswani, L., Covington, L., & Martínez, V. A. (2022). Fight for ethnic studies moves to K-12 classrooms. *Convergence*. <https://convergencemag.com/articles/fight-for-ethnic-studies-moves-to-k-12-classrooms>

Tintiango-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J. et al. (2015). Toward an ethnic studies pedagogy: Implications for K-12 schools from the research. *Urban Review*, 47, 104–125. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0280-y>

Trieu, M. M. (2017). “It was about claiming space”: exposure to Asian American studies, ethnic organization participation, and the negotiation of self among southeast Asian Americans. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(4), 518–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1272564>

UCLA History-Geography Project. (n.d.). *Lost LA curriculum project*. University of California, Los Angeles. <https://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/history-geography/>

Valdez, C. (2018). Flippin’ the scripted curriculum: ethnic studies inquiry in elementary education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(4), 581–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497959>

Verges, J. (2023, May 17). Here’s what’s in the giant education bill that passed the MN house and senate. *Pioneer Press*. <https://www.twincities.com/2023/05/17/heres-whats-in-the-giant-education-bill-that-passed-the-mn-house-and-senate/>

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>