

## **What is ethnic studies:**

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that examines the histories, experiences, cultures, and perspectives of racial and ethnic minority groups, with a particular focus on communities of color in the United States. The field emerged from student protests in the late 1960s, particularly at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley.

## **Why is ethnic studies being added to K-12 education**

Proponents of ethnic studies claim that in an increasingly diverse America it is important to tell the stories of racial and ethnic minorities that have been left out of conventional history classes. They claim that this increases student engagement among minority students resulting in improved grades and higher graduation rates.

## **Are these claims supported by data**

Most of the studies cited in support by proponents of ethnic studies do not directly assess the ethnic studies curriculum being implemented today. The most relevant, a study by Dee and Penner, has significant methodological flaws, including a small sample size, unclear causal mechanisms, and confounding factors such as additional interventions. While a slight positive effect was observed among a narrow group of at-risk students, the findings do not justify a large-scale curricular mandate affecting millions of students.

## **Why should parents be concerned about ethnic studies**

Most ethnic studies curricula promote a political ideology rather than provide an accurate account of American history and educate students to think for themselves. This ideology, often referred to as Critical Social Justice, holds that power, privilege and oppression shape society on the basis of immutable identity categories such as race, sex, and sexuality. Ethnic studies curricula selectively include or omit facts, narratives, and perspectives based on this ideology.

Many high schools require ethnic studies classes before students have been exposed to broader curricula in American or World history. This means that students do not have the facts to critically evaluate the assumptions of this ideology. In some high schools, ethnic studies classes are offered as a replacement for World history.

Many students exposed to ethnic studies classes have complained of discrimination because the curricula stigmatize certain identity groups as oppressors. Students who have felt targeted by the curricula include European Americans, Jewish students as well as successful ethnic minorities. Antisemitism is a particular concern: many ethnic studies classes describe Israel as a settler colonialist state, with the implication that Israel has no right to exist.

### **What parents can look for in an ethnic studies course**

Many school districts are adopting ethnic studies curricula before parents have had an opportunity to provide input. This is a warning that there may be objectionable material in the curriculum. If the material is available to review, look for content that emphasizes systems of power and includes terms such as “oppression”, “critical consciousness”, “hegemony”, “decolonization” and “white supremacy culture”. The reading list will often include Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” and Tolteka Cuauhtin’s “Rethinking Ethnic Studies.” Other red flags include an emphasis on activism rather than learning, and the devaluing of merit, objectivity and “Western ways of thinking”.

### **What is FAIR’s critique of ethnic studies curricula**

FAIR supports education that provides students with an honest account of the unique challenges faced by various ethnic groups, the resources they have used to face these challenges and the positive contributions each has made to the American experience. However, it is important to teach this material from multiple perspectives while avoiding race essentialist concepts that promote division and feelings of alienation among students. We also believe that much of the division and polarization in our society arises from a lack of understanding of our shared culture and values. It’s therefore imperative to instill and reinvigorate in students a fundamental understanding of civics and the founding principles of our country, as this is critical in maintaining and strengthening the fabric of our society.

Most ethnic studies curricula fail to meet these criteria.

## Additional Reading

### Validity of data supporting ethnic studies:

Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (2024). *A Guide to Evaluating Research on Ethnic Studies*. [https://www.fairforall.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EthnicStudies\\_C.pdf](https://www.fairforall.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EthnicStudies_C.pdf)

Dee, T. S., Penner, E. K. (2017). *The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum*. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21865>

Sander, R., Wyner, A.. (2022, March 28). *Studies Fail to Support Claims of New California Ethnic Studies Requirement*. Tablet. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/studies-fail-to-support-claims-new-california-ethnic-studies-requirement>

### Political ideology/bias:

North American Values Institute (2025) <<https://navivalues.org/resources/#antisemitism>> has resources on Critical Social Justice and antisemitism.

Alliance for Constructive Ethnic Studies (2025) *Liberated/Critical Ethnic Studies* <https://www.calethstudies.org/liberated-ethnic-studies-model-curriculum-overview>

Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (2025) *Comparing FAIR's American Experience Curriculum with Liberated Ethnic Studies*. < <https://www.fairforall.org/american-experience-curriculum/>>

Office of the Attorney General. (2024, January 9). *Guidance to School Districts re: Legal Requirements for Providing Inclusive Curricula and Books*, OAG-2024-01. California Department of Justice. <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/attachments/press-docs/Legal%20Alert%20Re%20Inclusive%20Curricula.1.9.24.1157CLEAN.pdf>

He, E. (2025, April 20) *This high school course is dividing districts across California*. Politico. <<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/20/this-high-school-course-is-dividing-districts-across-california-00299498>>

Honig, B. (2022, June 26). *California Schools Should Opt for Inclusive Ethnic Studies*. EdSource. <https://edsource.org/2022/california-schools-should-opt-for-inclusive-ethnic-studies/674538>

Israeli-American Civic Action Network. (2025, February 25). *The California Forum on Ethnic Studies in Public Schools* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0cUZ3v9b9M>