

Summary Points from FAIR's White Paper on the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (CESMC) claims to promote critical thinking about diverse American experiences, but frames history primarily in terms of identity and oppression. It fails to promote questioning, omits alternative viewpoints, and prioritizes political activism over objective, balanced instruction. Below are the key takeaways from FAIR's White Paper on the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Does not provide a liberal education. A true liberal education, rooted in rational inquiry and historical accuracy, should teach students how to think, not what to think. The CESMC, however, promotes activism and politically motivated narratives. The CESMC's stated goals are explicitly political or therapeutic; none include a comprehensive and unbiased understanding of American history and society.

Rooted in Critical Social Justice ideology. The CESMC is rooted in Critical Social Justice (CSJ) ideology, which holds that power, privilege and oppression shape society on the basis of identity categories such as race, sex, and sexuality. Critical Social Justice claims that oppression and injustice are embedded throughout society's institutions and must be dismantled through political activism. The CESMC selectively includes or omits facts, narratives, and perspectives based on the goals of CSJ ideology.

Reductive account of American history. The CESMC distorts American history by reducing complex narratives to simplistic binaries of oppressors and oppressed, prioritizing grievance-based identity politics over a balanced, fact-based exploration of history. It often highlights oppression while omitting stories of resilience, unity, and shared values.

Lionizes some groups and stigmatizes others. The CESMC frames certain identity groups as victims while stigmatizing others as oppressors. By prioritizing empathy and moral status for "BIPOC" students, while portraying European Americans primarily as sources of oppression, the curriculum fosters division rather than a shared understanding of history. It also undermines a sense of agency among the very groups it purports to champion.

Presents ongoing oppression as fact while ignoring contrary evidence. The CESMC assumes systemic racism is a defining feature of American society while ignoring evidence that racial disparities have complex causes beyond oppression. The curriculum neglects key historical trends, including America's success in reducing racism, expanding opportunities for minorities, and fostering economic and social integration. It also disregards the country's liberal principles of individualism, free markets, and equal protection under the law that have enabled diverse groups to prosper.

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Presents CSJ as Orthodoxy. While the CESMC claims to promote critical thinking, it directs scrutiny only at American society's alleged oppressive structures, never questioning the assumptions of Critical Social Justice itself. By treating this ideology as unquestionable orthodoxy, the curriculum stifles genuine intellectual inquiry and fosters ideological conformity and dogma. A truly liberal education would present alternative perspectives as well as critiques of CSJ ideology.

Is not a fully developed curriculum. The CESMC's model curriculum is a framework rather than a fully developed curriculum, which leaves gaps that external consultants—often aligned with liberated ethnic studies—can fill. The sample lessons are inconsistent, with some offering straightforward historical accounts and others focusing heavily on social justice activism and political messaging. Many lessons emphasize oppression, activism, and grievances over a balanced exploration of history, contributions, and resilience.

Parent and students say that CESMC is ideological pedagogy. Parents and students with direct experience of the CESMC report that it prioritizes political activism over balanced pedagogy, and focuses overwhelmingly on oppression narratives rather than historical and cultural studies. Many feel that Ethnic Studies promotes ideological conformity, discourages critical thinking, and pressures students to self-censor for fear of repercussions. Concerns include biased teachings, exclusion of contrary facts, and a lack of honest discourse.

Claimed academic benefits not strongly supported. The claimed academic benefits of ethnic studies largely rely on research by Christine Sleeter, but most of the studies cited do not directly assess the ethnic studies curriculum being implemented today. The most relevant evidence, 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.

Violates California's Statutory Requirements for Education. The CESMC violates both constitutional and statutory requirements by prescribing a single political orthodoxy—Critical Social Justice—without presenting alternative perspectives or contrary facts. Additionally, it fails to meet California's Education Code standards by portraying European-Americans adversely while omitting broader historical context, resulting in biased and inaccurate depictions of cultural and racial diversity.