



**Written Testimony for HB 2845:  
Constructing and Adopting Ethnic Students Standards  
March 15, 2017**

**Who We Are.** Oregon Student Voice (OSV) is a new student-led, non-partisan organization formed in August 2016 that encourages K-12 student participation and engagement in education decision making in Oregon. We are focused on meaningful progress toward student equity, access, engagement, and success in our K-12 education system. We aim to include student voice in decision making and policymaking in order to improve the quality of our education. We believe that student voice is essential when making education-related decisions as we are the system's main beneficiaries and hold knowledge and expertise as key actors in the system.

**Support of Ethnic Studies Standards.** Oregon is home to a wide array of cultures, backgrounds, ideologies, genders, races, ethnicities, religions, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientations. While the makeup of Oregon's population is diverse, current social studies standards do not reflect this fact. We believe that students in Oregon public schools are deprived of an education that represents the many histories and perspectives of individuals within the state. To resolve this issue, we, Oregon Student Voice, support the passage of HB 2845 in the 2017 legislative session.

The lack of a comprehensive inclusive education in public schools can create unnecessary barriers to students from all backgrounds as it can perpetuate and validate oppressive systems. Research shows that incorporating ethnic studies can address this important concern as well as have several other key benefits for students. These include:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Deepening understanding for individuals relative to others.* An inclusive education allows students to understand their own unique experiences and build diverse viewpoints relative to their experiences. Students will realize how their experience relates to and interacts with other experiences different from their own.
2. *Elevating unheard voices and democratizing education communities.* An inclusive education recognizes and elevates experiences and cultures that are traditionally marginalized and unheard. Including all stories in instruction will help promote social equality within school communities as all experiences and cultures are seen as valuable and important. This is an essential characteristic of democratic institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the research, please review our policy brief on HB 2845 at [http://oregonstudentvoice.weebly.com/uploads/8/4/4/4/84445996/osv\\_policy\\_brief - the need for inclusive curriculum.pdf](http://oregonstudentvoice.weebly.com/uploads/8/4/4/4/84445996/osv_policy_brief_-_the_need_for_inclusive_curriculum.pdf)

3. *Building on Oregon's holistic approach to addressing chronic absenteeism.* Students are more highly motivated and engaged when their education reflects their backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Oregon's 2016 Chronic Absenteeism Report suggested an engaging education that represents all stories could improve attendance in Oregon's classrooms.
4. *Addressing differences.* Students in Oregon often encounter difference within their school communities. This difference sometimes leads to bullying and hateful actions among students in the form of physical and mental harassment. In order to combat these actions, ignorance must be replaced by understanding. An inclusive education can provide students with knowledge that breaks down harmful stereotypes and increases empathy for peers.
5. *Preparing students for a global economy.* Possessing an understanding of diversity is vital for success in today's economy. Employers increasingly look for cultural competency in qualified applicants. An inclusive education is necessary in K-12 schools in order to ensure that Oregon's students obtain these skills and are competitive in the job market.

**Testimony from Oregon High School Students.** In the following, we provide student testimony to show why and how students in Oregon support HB 2845. While OSV's goal is to be statewide, as a new organization, we are still mostly concentrated in the I-5 corridor. As a result, the student testimonies reflect this fact. However, it is our mission to continue to gain geographically diverse representation from students across Oregon. As we grow, we will continue to update this document with new testimonies from students. For now, we have included six testimonies from diverse high school students.

I believe it would be beneficial to develop ethnic studies standards because as our country's demographics continue to change, we must learn about each other's cultures and histories in order to have a better understanding and a new perspective. By having this better understanding, it will create a better communication with people different than us. A 2016 article in *The Atlantic* has shown that ethnic studies influence student performance and graduation rates as students develop better critical thinking skills and self-esteem from these classes.<sup>2</sup> With ethnic studies there will be less hostility between students and they will be able to overcome their differences.

- Ebado Abdi, Junior at Westview High School

Learning about the histories of the underrepresented will give me more of a perspective of the traditions that happen within other cultures as well as why they happen. It will also benefit me because if I ever want to work somewhere with a diverse environment or in

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<sup>2</sup> This article can be accessed at <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/>

different country, I will be aware of the histories that occurred there and will have the knowledge to prevent any insensitivity that could come with not knowing anything about individual's histories. Learning about my own culture will help me to connect with other people who share similar cultures and be able to know the histories of where I came from and what other people apart of my same culture had to do in the past for me to live the life that I live right now. Lastly, I think learning about ethnic studies will improve our school environment because it will help people to understand the minorities more and connect with them by knowing a little more about their lives.

- Lizzy H., Sophomore at Grant High School

I would love to learn more about the histories, contributions, and perspectives of the historically marginalized and underrepresented. I feel that it will help students of color, like myself, to have a better understanding and overall awareness of their backgrounds and all that their history entails. I see stronger relationships being formed among people who have the same beliefs and feelings towards ethnic backgrounds. Along with that, I feel that ethnic students might begin to feel more comfortable in a way, knowing that a larger group of students have a better understanding of the underrepresented students history.

- Savanna Jones, Sophomore at Oregon City High School

Ethnic studies is important in order to provide a broadened narrative of history to students. It can help to empower students of different ethnic backgrounds by providing insight into influential figures who are more similar to themselves. Additionally, I believe it can help to provide more holistic perspectives into conversations and expand an individual's educational experience. I hope that these new standards can bring power to underrepresented and marginalized groups that are too often neglected within Common Core learning standards.

- Adam Nayak, Junior at Cleveland High School

The more I can learn about different cultures and ways of life, the more I understand what it means to be human. Ethnic studies is a first step towards embracing people who are different with compassion and curiosity and excitement to learn from their experience. I would love to see more shared about my culture and to learn about other people's history would help me understand more about how cultural background fits into identity. Ethnic studies will make people more curious and interested in learning about each other and seeking out new perspectives. It will also give people the tools to learn about other people's histories throughout their lives.

- S. Whitman Spitzer, Senior at Corvallis High school

I am a Black/African student from David Douglas High School in Southeast Portland. As diverse as our student body is, our social studies education unfortunately does not align with that. I want to learn about the histories of my own culture and others. I believe it will be an exciting, yet educational experience for students to learn about contributions other than traditional American history. This learning experience will provide students with knowledge on different culture and traditions. I feel there are many historical people from diverse backgrounds that impacted the world in one way or the other that often get left out of textbooks. Ethnic studies also gives student of color a chance to share their culture and background. This will feed students' curious minds and help us relate to each other in a positive way. This experience will also eliminate conflict, as students will feel more close and be able to show empathy towards others. Being African, there has been quite a few times where I did not feel a part of my school, especially since my people were not positively represented my education. We usually only talked about the transatlantic slave trade. We didn't get to shed light on successes and accomplishments of the African people or any other people for that matter. I strongly believe ethnic studies will give equity to all students and will represent and include everyone.

- Taiye Timothy, Sophomore at David Douglas High School