

Albuquerque Public High Schools Ethnic Studies Implementation Policy Brief
Fall 2018

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Brief Historical Overview & Context

For several years, grassroots organizing and community advocacy pushed for Ethnic Studies (ES) to be implemented in Albuquerque Public Schools (APS). In 2016, the APS School Board voted to offer ES as an elective throughout all high schools in the district with the support of APS administration. During this period, the APS-UNM Ethnic Studies Education and Health (ESEH) Research Practice Partnership was formed to collectively support the sustainable implementation of ES across the district (<https://youtu.be/5LkniHb0pSE>). The national trend in offering ES is based on research evidence that shows that an ES curriculum increases graduation rates, attendance, GPA, positive self-concept, and, incidentally, standardized test scores, especially for marginalized high school youth of color (Dee and Penner, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2012; Cabrera et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2011). The purpose of this memo is to offer a snapshot of current practices, short and long-term solutions, and key implementation strategies needed to ensure the successes and sustainability of ES. We hope some of the short-term goals can be accomplished for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Quantitative Data

One of the main purposes of the APS-ESEH partnership is to better understand who has access to ES, and what impact ES has on educational outcomes; however, we were not able to collect and analyze quantitative data at this time. A key challenge has been that the course codes for established courses that existed before the district wide implementation in Fall 2017 (e.g., Chicana/o Studies; Native American Studies) are not only different from each other but they are different from the course codes for the new ES offerings (African American Studies, Human Rights, or other topic/group). The lack of harmonization of course codes for ES courses renders the district unable to easily collect and analyze quantitative baseline data on the number and types of ES courses being offered as well as the demographics of enrolled students. Once this issue is resolved we can provide a snapshot of the number of classes offered by schools as well as the number of students (demographics such as race, gender, class breakdown). Of particular interest is our ability to use demographic baseline data that allows us to do an intersectional equity analysis to discern patterns of who has access to a given type of ES course and how student outcomes are impacted.

Qualitative Data

To better understand the implementation and sustainability of ES, we conducted four focus group interviews with ES teachers that attended four workshops at the Albuquerque Teachers Federation (ATF) office in Spring 2018. Additionally, we conducted in-depth interviews with 16 high school ES teachers. These teachers fell into three categories: 1) those who had never taught ES but were planning to do so, 2) those that had recently started teaching ES (taught ES classes less than five years), and 3) veteran teachers (taught ES classes for five years or more). It is important to note that some schools had taught ES for over four decades, while at some other schools ES had never been offered. For the purposes of this report and in line with the confidentiality protocol of the IRB, we have excluded all teacher identifiers to protect their anonymity amid a small sample size.

INSIGHTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHNIC STUDIES FROM TEACHERS

Importance of ethnic studies

One of the first key findings was that every teacher we interviewed relayed the importance of ES. They conveyed how ES has helped them to establish strong relationships with students, fostered critical thinking, empowered students and helped develop positive student identities. Due to these powerful experiences, all teachers were adamant on expanding ES.

Data:

“Ethnic Studies does rebuild hope in people because it’s not one straight ideology across the board and we all have to believe this...It’s more of, ‘OK, yeah, I get it and I believe it, but this is what makes me unique too.’ And for so long kids haven’t had that voice, particularly kids of color.”

“And we need to be giving them [students] the foundation for which they build their identities, how they build who they are, how they share this information to other people and we need to make sure that we give that a healthy and positive manner so that they’re not angry about who they are, that they’re not unsure about who they are. And these conversations have to happen, that’s why I think this class is so important.”

“And so ethnic studies also provides this kind of really perfect place for them [students] to not be silenced and for them to be able to express [their] opinions, thoughts, feelings, about a whole

range of things and to be exposed to new ideas that then enriches them as well and you can see that they are becoming a more full person.”

“I think to give students this history--to make sure that they are aware of various chapters in American history--it kind of allows them to make sense of what’s going on in their world today, and also gives them some ideas for dealing with it in their own time.”

Administrative Support-School Level

ES is highly successful only with administrative support, but leaving its success to a function of administrative buy-in creates inequitable opportunities across the district. They control scheduling, determine whether a class will make despite low student enrollment, aide with advertisement/recruitment, assist with finding resources, and can support teacher training by providing substitutes. Consequently, it is also important to have counselor support because they directly advise students and they are critical to advertisement and recruitment.

Short-term Solution: School administrators allow ES to make even if there is low enrollment, provide more sections of ES by providing multiple pathways for students to take ES (e.g., dual credit, elective or equivalent substitute) at the same school. Counselors can help with the advertisement and recruitment of ES by informing students.

Long-term Goal: Administrators are important gatekeepers in determining whether or not ES is successful at a school. Thus, there should be more collaboration between the district and administrators in order to ensure the successful implementation of ES. In collaboration with the APS-ESEH partnership, administrators at school and district levels can assist in data collection of ES and develop long term vision goals.

Data:

“It sounds like some of the schools are extremely supportive of ethnic studies and some of the principals are very supportive. And then it sounds like some of the schools don’t even have ethnic studies and they still don’t offer it. So I would really like to see the opportunities for students at all schools to have the same opportunities.”

“You have to have administrators that care and that are open and also have knowledge of what is needed.”

“Recruiting for class, I think it’s really super important to get your counselor on board so that they can help you advertise for that.”

Administrative Support-District Level

Expanding Equity, Access and Impact Beyond the Limitations of Dual Credit

ES is offered in many different formats (federal Native American Studies Government courses that are only open to enrolled Native American students); dual credit (only open to 11th and 12th grade students who have a minimum 2.5 GPA); and electives (which only reach a few students and makes them vulnerable to low enrollment and are generally not available to 9th and 10th grades). While it is important to offer a wide variety of formats, there should be a dedicated approach to ensuring equitable access to all students as soon as they enter 9th grade. Currently, the approach to offering ES is fragmented and highly dependent on the school and administrative support.

Dual credit classes are an important part of offering students access to college credit bearing coursework while they are in high school. Dual credit is viewed by several teachers as one of the few options through which APS would support ES and are inquisitive on what steps are needed to make dual credit possible at their respective schools. However, dual credit limits the number of students eligible due to GPA and grade level requirements (open to 11th and 12th grade only). Research shows that academically vulnerable students (9th and 10th grade with low GPA's) are the students most likely to benefit from these courses. In Tucson, Arizona the graduation rate of Mexican American students was just below 50% prior to ES being offered to ALL students. Students who participated in ES were 51% more likely to graduate than those that were not enrolled and 108% more likely to graduate in general. There was also a significant positive impact on standardized test scores (Cabrera et.al, 2012). Therefore, while it is important to continue to expand dual credit classes, it is also equally important to provide numerous pathways for students to take ES classes, pathways such as making them social studies or English equivalents, and/or electives.

Short-term Solution: Offer multiple sections of ES at the same school that include: dual credit, electives, and equivalents with administrative and counselor support through advertisement, recruitment, and allowing courses to make even with low student enrollment.

Long-term Goal: Expand ES to all grades. Transform the 9th grade NM History class to include a primary focus on the key concepts of ES such as: intersectionality, power, social justice, dehumanization, hegemony, self-reflexivity, and empowerment. (For more information on the implementation of ES with 9th grades in the San Francisco School district visit: race.unm.edu, click ethnic studies “Implementation Brief for San Francisco Unified School District). Teachers can also utilize the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center’s counter-narrative history curriculum (<https://www.indianpueblo.org/learn/teachers/>). Additionally, concentrate on classes such as

Credit Recovery as a place to integrate ES principles and pedagogy as an enhancement to *Gradpoint*.

Data:

“I feel like a great way that would motivate students to really get into ethnic studies in high school would be to offer it possibly as a dual credit class.”

“So, instead of taking US History, you could take ethnic studies.”

“So because it’s only an elective here, I’m missing a lot of people. A lot of students do not get to take it.”

Ethnic Studies as a Graduation Requirement

One of the most prevalent recommendations from teachers interviewed was the desire to see ES as a graduation requirement. Nearly every teacher asserted that doing so may improve student retention, subject content knowledge, affirm student identities, fortify student-teacher relationship, privilege student and community knowledge, and open dialogue to the pressing issues students and communities face. Empirically, there is also evidence that students were up to 118% more likely to pass standardized tests after participating in an ES curriculum if they had initially failed a section in the past (Cabrera et.al, 2012).

Short-term Solution: Offer existing ES teachers more sections and expand capacity for more instructors to teach ES with added supports, including UNM pedagogical supports.

Long-term Goal: Introduce legislation to make ES a requirement. Also, expand ES by expanding dual credit to the students who do not currently meet state legislative requirements (minimum 2.5 GPA and grade level). Schools could offer an introduction to key concepts in ES in lower grades with more specialized courses (e.g., Africana, Asian American, Native American and Chicana/o Studies) in upper grades. We recommend that this survey-style ES introductory course be a graduation requirement for all students who would then have opportunities to take more focused courses as electives, dual credit, or Language Arts or Social Studies equivalents.

Data:

“...If it were a core course or a required course...[or] not losing the elective credit, but say if you can lobby the state into allowing it to count as an English replacement or a social studies

replacement credit or legitimize it as in terms of like an English credit or a social studies credit, we probably got a lot more weight with it.”

“[Something] I would love to see is that everybody should have to graduate with an ethnic studies credit from high school. I think that that would be very beneficial for everybody.”

“Why couldn’t we also have an ethnic studies requirement? I think we’re missing the importance of ethnic studies which is the foundation of so many important conversations that need to be had. And if and when it’s taught correctly, it is going to open up so many conversations with the student and the teacher and hopefully, at home and with friends, and it will blossom, hopefully, in the students something rich and something really important within them.”

“My dream would be to see it as a required course, either...comprehensive or a specific Chicano, African-American or to have a streamlined way to make it—allow it to be an English requirement or a history requirement...there’s one teacher who’s been able to get it replaced as your English 11 requirement, but it was about a three-year long process with the PED that he had to go through.”

Recruitment/Scheduling

Recruitment, scheduling, and advertising are vital components to support the long term sustainability of ES. Teachers used a wide variety of strategies to recruit students for their ES courses, such as particularly recruiting struggling students as intervention, utilizing flyers, and/or directly speaking to students. However, recruitment was strongly determined by administrative support. For example, some teachers were given full access to students one year while the following year they were not. Another barrier to student recruitment was the lack of clarity and understanding of ES on the part of key stakeholders, which included teachers, counselors, administrators and students. Complications with the scheduling and registration of ES was impacted by preferential assignment of class time slots, competition with better-known courses, and/or required courses. Empirical evidence has shown that growth of ES occurs through student word of mouth even when recruitment was not successful (Palos et al., 2011)

Short-term Solution: Harmonize ES offerings at the high school level to minimize competition with required courses. Initiate and empower ES teacher-led informational and recruitment campaigns to increase student awareness of classes. Work with parent centers to disseminate information. Support the word of mouth recruitment of ES.

Long-term Goal: Continue informational campaigns regarding ES. Drastically increase the sections and multiple courses by offering ES at all grade levels, particularly targeting 9th grade students who have struggled academically.

Data:

“Yeah, recruiting was really easy last year because I could go to the grade level meetings...I could pitch my class, build it and talk about it and really get kids interested in it. This year, I wasn't able to do that.”

“I know just from my own personal little experience, where the kids will be like, ‘Oh, I saw that class but I didn’t know what that was. What is ethnic studies?’ I’ll be honest actually, even teachers, when they’ll be like, ‘Oh, you know, what is that ethnic studies class,’ or they’ll say, ‘Ethics,’ and I’m like, ‘No.’”

Resources

Another key barrier to the successful implementation of ES has been a dearth of resources available to teachers. For example, some teachers were unable to incorporate primary materials shared during workshops because of copyright. As a result, teachers reported having to purchase classroom materials and resources out of their own funds.

Short-term Solution: Provide funding and support for the purchase and creation of varied resources for ES classroom teachers. Have APS ES website available for the sharing of resources and curricular ideas that allows for teachers to share successful ideas and units without imposing a standardized textbook or curriculum.

Long-term Goal: APS-UNM ESEH partnership apply to grant funding from varied sources to support ES (e.g., WT Grant Foundation multi-site study with the National Network of Research Practice Partnerships-NNERPP).

Data:

“I think the biggest barrier that we have right now is a financial one. From what I understand, our books have not all been ordered... So I will purchase the books myself, if necessary, so we will have books in the fall. If I need to do a fundraising, Go Fund Me, or anything like that, that’s fine.”

“And having resources... easily accessible. So, like some sort [of] database where we can easily go in there, access something and see it played out. Whether it’s like a short video, like somebody’s unit, and make it our own.”

“Like resources. [But] I would not like to see where it’s a book and everyone is teaching exactly the same thing.”

Targeted training, and professional development

A repeated theme found in the data was requests for more advanced trainings that focused more in-depth on ES content, and/or utilizing ES to advance student wellness. Teachers wanted professional development on more critical approaches in an analysis of power and privilege at the intersections of race, gender, class, citizenship, language, ability, etc. In fact, targeted and purposeful training can be vital resources for the successful implementation of ES within APS since professional development opportunities on pedagogy are a key ingredient for student success. Teachers spoke about the specific benefits they experienced by participating in the APS ES Summit where they had the opportunity to collaborate, learn, and develop curriculum. Additionally, the Summer 2017 XITO Workshops and/or the Spring 2018 workshops at AFT were beneficial because they were able to transfer workshop knowledge into classroom content (e.g., cajitas project, loteria, art based and culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy). During our interviews, which primarily took place in the classrooms of ES teachers, we were able to document that teachers had implemented the classroom-based activities they learned during the XITO and Spring 2018 trainings. More importantly, teachers were hungry for the opportunity to meet more regularly with other teachers so that they could exchange ideas to create a more robust ES program. In some cases, teachers who may be teaching at the same high school lacked structured opportunities to engage with each other to plan, share and develop strategies for teaching ES. In a study of ES programs across the country, researchers found that programs that engaged community in trainings and that were centered on pedagogical training rather than content filtering were most successful in terms of sustainability and student transformation (Titiangco-Cubales et. al, 2014).

Short-term Solution: Create a dedicated listserv and virtual community connecting all ES teachers to communicate trainings and professional development. Plan for advanced trainings to increase ES pedagogy and content with feedback from experienced ES teachers as well as allow veteran ES teachers to lead trainings.

Long-term Goal: Facilitating a critical friends group for ES teachers to support one another in curriculum resources, pedagogical resources, and to invite community, district and university experts to enrich the process. Cultivate an ES teacher network and establish a professional development framework in conjunction with the research partnership that hits all key

pedagogical points, is aligned with Common Core, is grounded in anti-racism, follows the strands, and utilizes intersectionality & critical frameworks to prepare ES teachers. Utilize a peer-mentoring model that include visits to each other's classrooms for peer-to-peer boundary crossing (e.g., across Native American, Chicana/o, Africana but also between recent and veteran ES teachers).

Data:

“I need to go see what the heck Mr. X is doing over at [School X] and how he is making things happen...So I want to be able to go to [School X] and watch him teach or to meet with him and have him tell me how he's doing that.”

“It will be great if we had opportunities to go to see what other people [in the] nation are doing too. I'm not saying like send 50 teachers over there but if they can have opportunity to send like a few of us over there to check it out.”

“The ones from UNM were really—I thought they were really beneficial. Like they gave you a lot of good ideas like to use in the classroom. Like I use some of the stuff that we did in there with my kids.”

Legislative Support

Teacher Degree & Credentialing Requirements

Teachers all said they did not have a degree requirement that prepared them to teach ES. Some teachers noted that they may have taken one or two classes as electives during their degree that were related to ES. As of right now, degree and credentialing requirements for ES teachers are spotty and inconsistent. Many teachers felt underprepared or unsure as to how to approach teaching ES. Teachers also noted that some of their peers were still struggling to grapple with analyses surrounding power, privilege, positionality, and intersectionality while still trying to teach students.

Short-term Solution: Through professional development and critical friends group all new and returning ES teachers will receive core ES pedagogical tools from peers and presenters.

Long-term Goal: APS require all incoming teachers have an ES credit. Introduce legislation that requires ES training/required for all teachers K-12 as a requirement for degree attainment/accreditation regardless of field of study (e.g., required for Science, Math, PE, Art, Special Education, Humanities, Social Studies, etc.).

Data:

“I had class with one of the teachers for absolutely cultural equity. She was Navajo...It was beautiful. It was so much like the ethnic studies. She wanted us to recognize who we were. The people in our class, we went to her house, we went to a variety of tours and activities around town to become aware of more Navajo studies.”

“And there were other teachers at my school who were teaching ethnic studies and in fact, still are teaching ethnic studies, who I know for a fact were dealing with their own personal issues around race and class and other things like that while they’re trying to teach students.”

Conclusion

The findings from our research echo many of the findings from nationwide assessments of ES programs. “Ethnic Studies pedagogy has implications for recruitment, preparation, hiring, and support of teachers.” (Titiangco-Cubales et.al, 2015). Thus, ES can either be a “flame that’s flickering in the wind” or be “implemented across all schools, mandatory in all high schools...[or] even become a graduation requirement statewide” as a result of strong, robust implementation. In this report, we laid out the key barriers that are impeding the progress of ES within APS as well as strategies on how it can become more successful. At this moment, APS has the chance to transform K-12 education with the implementation of ES.

We close by rehashing key steps APS should take and we hope that some of these strategic policy options can be pursued as soon as possible and hopefully by Fall 2019-Spring 2020:

1. Reiterate to school administrators the importance of ES and one of the key goals APS has in transforming student learning.
2. ES should have multiple pathways that it is being offered: dual credit, elective, and core requirement equivalents. In addition, school administrators should assist in recruitment, advertisement, and allow courses to make even if there is low enrollment.
3. ES should be offered at all grade levels in high school and eventually to middle and elementary schools.
4. ES should be a graduation requirement.
5. ES coursework should be a requirement for all preservice and inservice teachers.
6. ES should be readily available and easily accessible on the APS website.
7. A critical friends group should be sponsored as part of ES teachers ongoing professional development where they can network, share, collaborate and develop rigorous ES curriculum.

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APPENDIX

Relevant Themes, Code Definition and Frequency as an Appendix Table.

Table 1: Top 10 Code Themes from the Data*

Table 2: Code Frequencies for Child Codes of Challenges & Barriers Theme**

Table 1: Top 10 Code Themes from the Data*

| Code | Code Frequency | Code Description |
|--|----------------|--|
| Challenges & Barriers | 130 | Challenges/Barriers mentioned, but not elaborated enough to fall into a particular child code |
| Identity | 99 | Incorporation of student identity in the class, issues concerning identity |
| Classroom Activities | 98 | Classroom activities including engagement of contemporary issues & media |
| Curriculum | 96 | Examples given of curriculum used in ethnic studies courses |
| Lived Experiences | 83 | Lived experiences and testimonios of both teachers and students |
| Community Wealth/Cultural Capital | 59 | Wealth/Capital inherent in students of color, but often discounted in education systems |
| Empowerment | 58 | Experiences that lead a student or teacher to validation, hope, pride, understandings in their lived experiences |
| Healing | 54 | Modes of healing used in the classroom ranging from centering community to cultural relevant practices |
| Trainings | 50 | Teachers mentioning any ethnic studies specific trainings: XITO, anti-racism training, UNM Workshops |
| Solutions to Ethnic Studies Implementation | 49 | Proposed solutions for ethnic studies success in APS along with a vision for ethnic studies success. |

* This table shows the frequency distribution for the 10 themes that received the most coded excerpts in the data. This does NOT include any sub-codes/child codes that appear within each of these themes. For the Challenges & Barriers theme, the distributions for the child codes are listed in the next table.

Table 2: Code Frequencies for Child Codes of Challenges & Barriers Theme**

| Child Code | Code Frequency | Code Description |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Financial Issues/Resources | 57 | Lack of supplies, lack of funding, having to cancel the class for low enrollment |
| Access to Ethnic Studies | 32 | Access issues to ethnic studies - limited course offerings, dual credit creating barrier for students w/lower GPAs, lack of alternative options for ethnic studies beyond dual credit. |
| Ethnic Studies Course Credits | 28 | The credit structure of the course - whether it is recognized as a dual credit course, simply an elective, or the type of credit students earn for the course. |
| Principal/School Admin. Support | 27 | Instructors speak about the support or lack of support that they have experienced in their schools. |
| Recruitment | 25 | Teacher describes APS struggle to recruit qualified teachers or the inability to recruit students to enroll in courses |
| Political Climate | 20 | Political climate being adversary or hostile towards an ethnic studies curriculum |
| Scheduling | 16 | Scheduled at times coinciding w/other popular classes or at times less students will be likely to participate or not enough sections to accommodate demand. |
| Interpersonal Conflict | 15 | Conflict between teachers, teachers vs. administrators, lack of community support |
| Advertisement | 7 | Inability to advertise course content due to various factors: unsure what the course entails, new/foreign concept for students |
| Parent/Student Objections | 6 | Parent/student object to course content and do not enroll/allow child to enroll in the course. |
| Total Child Codes = 10 | 233 | |

** This distribution of frequencies for child codes does not include general mentions of challenges and barriers in the data. When participants spoke of challenges and barriers in a non-specified manner (didn't identify the type of challenge or barrier or not enough information was given to determine that it fell into one of these child codes), the data was coded as Challenges/Barriers Overall (this distribution is available in Table 1).

Visual Summary

