



Press Release

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Montebello Unified Adopts Pioneering Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement

MONTEBELLO, CA – Responding to the needs of its community and continuing its mission to provide multi-cultural, lingual and ethnic instruction and opportunity for its students, Montebello Unified has become the fourth school district in California to adopt Ethnic Studies curricula as a high school graduation requirement. The resolution, adopted by the MUSD Board of Education on Feb. 19, mandates that the requirement be implemented within two years.

“History and culture are what bind us together as a community and as a nation, and we will never waver in our commitment to represent and promote diversity and inclusiveness,” Montebello Unified Board President Edgar Cisneros said. “We have heard our teachers, students and community loud and clear in their support of this program, and we are extremely proud to be moving forward with implementation of Ethnic Studies at MUSD.”

The desire to include an ethnic studies academic curriculum was sparked by the Board's goal to encourage students to think critically about language, race, ethnicity and culture to best prepare them to understand and adapt to an increasingly diverse world.

The District received support from students, past and present, teachers, community members, local college professors, among others, who all voiced passionate enthusiasm to bolster the Ethnic Studies courses at Montebello Unified. Currently, high school courses in Mexican-American Studies, Minority Cultures in America and Multicultural Studies are offered as electives, as is a strong Dual Language Immersion Program.

The resolution, which lays out a plan to provide outstanding educational opportunities to all students without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, income, sexual orientation or disability, also requires that Ethnic Studies courses be created for all elementary and intermediate schools within four years.

“There is substantial research that proves that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula produces positive academic and social outcomes for students,” said Superintendent of Education Susanna Contreras Smith. “We are guided by core values of equity, inclusiveness and universally high expectations at Montebello Unified and we are eager to continue to foster strong ties between our students and their families, schools and neighborhoods.”

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In order to ensure that Montebello Unified proceeds with prudence and expertise, the District also intends to form an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee. The committee is comprised of 15 people: two high school students, two parents, four certified employees, two classified employees, two administrators, two District office personnel and one professor from an institution of higher education.

The Advisory Committee will meet and coordinate periodically with the Dual Language Immersion Program Advisory Committee.

In addition, the District will direct the superintendent to appoint an Ethnic Studies facilitator devoted entirely to overseeing the expansion of the existing Ethnic Studies courses to all high schools, develop new Ethnic Studies course offerings, and prepare a budget to align Ethnic Studies with the Common Core State Standards.

“We will develop curriculum, professional development, and other support systems to ensure that quality courses offered by passionate and qualified teachers fulfill our rigorous academic standards and all graduation requirements,” said Superintendent of Schools Cleve Pell. “Through existing partnerships and the forging of new ventures with institutions of higher education and thriving Ethnic Studies programs, we will continue to enrich the lives of our students in a collaborative and meaningful way. ”

At present, 32 languages other than English are spoken in District schools, with the primary languages being Spanish, Cantonese and Armenian.

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Montebello Unified School District is a dynamic learning institution employing top-quality educators. It is the combined work of many that allows the District to continue educating more than 30,000 students every year using the 40 Developmental Assets at all of our school sites. It is through everyone’s efforts – students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators – that we are achieving the District’s number one goal of raising student achievement. Learn more online at www.montebello.k12.ca.us.