

NEWS

National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)

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Nation's Foremost Multicultural Education Organization (NAME) Assails Arizona's new Education Policy

(Washington, DC) On May 11, 2010, the Governor of Arizona signed a bill banning ethnic studies in the public schools of Arizona. The bill was targeted specifically at Mexican American/Raza Studies in Tucson. We are outraged that this bill was passed, since it flies in the face of research on textbooks and multicultural curricula, research on U.S. history, and the track record of Tucson's Mexican American/Raza Studies department to successfully educate Chicano/a students.

The bill presumes that the standard curriculum is not biased and represents no ethnic point of view. However, those who study race ethnicity point out that white people are also ethnic, making that presumption incorrect. Let's take U.S. history as an example. Standard U.S. history texts construct the story of the United States based on the experiences of Europeans and white Americans. Although North America was populated long before the British set foot on the continent, and although Spanish settlements preceded British settlements, typically the story in U.S. history texts starts in Europe, moving from British settlements on the East Coast, westward. To be sure, texts include American Indians, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans, but only as they relate to the larger story dominated by white people. In fact, because of their numeric predominance in U.S. history texts, as well as the structuring of the storyline around their experience, one can view the texts as teaching white ethnic studies.

The same might be said for literature. If you go through the literature curriculum and find that the majority of works are primarily by and about people of European descent, you have identified a white ethnic studies curriculum. If we take this law seriously, white-dominant curricula should be outlawed as well, paving the way for multicultural curricula that represents the experiences, viewpoints, and intellectual knowledge of the diverse peoples of Arizona and the United States.

By attacking the work of the Mexican American/Raza Studies department in Tucson, the bill ignores the fact that its work has been substantially improving the academic achievement and graduation rates of Chicano/a students. For example, while many high school students who enter the Social Justice Education Project that the department sponsors are on the verge of dropping out, since 2004 the graduation rate of its students has been about 95%, and most go on to college. Students whom the department serves outscore students who are not in the program in reading, writing and math on the AIMS tests by wide margins, mainly because the curriculum speaks to their experiences, their realities, and their identities. In addition, the Mexican American/Raza Studies curriculum is academically difficult; the students are taught as if they are college-bound rather than “at risk” of dropping out.

For these reasons, we condemn this new law. Further, because of the strong integrity of the work of the Mexican American/Raza Studies department in Tucson, and its proven track record successfully educating Chicano/a students, we will be featuring its former director, Dr. Augustine Romero, as a keynote speaker at the National Association for Multicultural Education Annual Conference, which will be held November 4-6, 2010, in Las Vegas.

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