



Enacting Ethnic Studies Standards Means Supporting Teachers in Learning about Race and Racism

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The past two years have been illustrative of the racial tensions that underlie American society, and education is one of the main ways that people learn (or don't learn) about our nation's history and ways to interrupt racism.

Oregon has the potential to be a leader in the nation in terms of proactively addressing issues of race and racism in K-12 classrooms, creating a safe and productive learning environment for all students, and [better preparing children to understand and counteract racism](#). House Bill (HB) 2845, passed by the state legislature in 2017 in response to student and educator advocacy, mandated that ethnic studies standards must be enacted by the 2026-2027 school year. Ethnic studies has been shown to be [a highly effective way to address racism in schools](#).

If state-level decision-makers are truly committed to making sure that Oregon children receive the high-quality and equitable education envisioned by the creation of the ethnic studies standards, then they will need to attend mindfully to how that money is spent to ensure that teachers receive systematic, ongoing support to do this difficult work effectively.

Key Takeaways

- The Oregon state legislature has mandated that new ethnic studies standards be implemented in Oregon K-12 schools by the 2026-2027 school year.
- Effective ethnic studies instruction requires that school leaders and teachers receive ongoing support to teach about historical and contemporary race and racism in the U.S.
- Funding should be allocated toward supporting teachers to develop racial literacy.

However, the support and resources teachers will be given to grow their capacity to do this work are not yet clear. To that end, HB 4112 was proposed during the most recent legislative session as a follow-up to HB 2845, but it did not pass. Considering that this work still demands attention and the deadline for standards implementation is growing closer, there is an opportunity to continue to advocate for passage of HB 4112, as well as to provide guidance on how to spend the money in ways that research suggests is necessary to create the desired impacts.

Why do teachers need ongoing support?

In order for K-12 teachers to be successful in teaching ethnic studies, they need to have foundational knowledge about the identities students bring to school, and how those identities relate to systems of power in our society. One salient identity is race, and given the overwhelming whiteness of the Oregon teaching force, it is imperative that teachers have the tools to understand their own racial identities and those of their students, in addition to being knowledgeable about historical and contemporary issues affecting racially marginalized communities. Only then will they be able to foster healthy conversations about race in their classrooms and fully understand and respond to the needs of their students.

Although [many Americans agree on the need to attend to issues of race](#) in ways that make all children feel supported and included, addressing these issues can be challenging for teachers, especially in terms of uncovering the biases and stereotypes we have all internalized and that make up our society. Educators can continue to develop their racial literacy if necessary resources like ongoing professional discussions with knowledgeable facilitators are provided.

What kind of support do teachers need?

Teachers need focused professional development and ongoing, systematic opportunities to continue to learn about the ethnic studies standards, as well as how to continually refine their practice. In particular, resources should be targeted toward supporting teachers in engaging with students in a collaborative way on issues of social and racial justice. Funding can be allocated toward effective, research-based models, such as [critical professional development](#), in which teachers are actively involved in constructing meaning and working collaboratively as they learn.

How do we provide this support?

This in-depth work can be challenging and time consuming, so policymakers should look to allocate funds in ways that best provide what teachers need to fully engage in these issues. One especially promising idea is to create a small network of districts in which to pilot a professional development sequence, building in ongoing assessment to ensure it is meeting teachers' needs and affecting student learning. Additional ways to support this work include:

- Paying teachers for the time they spend doing professional development
- Subsidizing the cost of continuing education or college credits related to this work
- Providing stipends to pay for professional texts and other resources
- Partnering with universities to draw on faculty expertise

Following these recommendations will allow for more complex and comprehensive instruction about the histories, perspectives, and experiences of historically marginalized peoples in the U.S.