

EDUCATION

Minnesota to Mandate K-12 Ethnic Studies Instruction in 2026

Parents are allowed to review all curricula and opt their child out of instruction found objectionable, in which case schools must provide alternatives.



Twin City Teachers and their supporters march in Minneapolis on Feb. 12, 2022. Hannah Hobus/Pioneer Press via AP



Aaron Gifford

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In the coming weeks, school boards across the Land of 10,000 Lakes state will decide on curricula to meet ethnic studies mandates for the 2026–2027 academic year.

There appear to be limited alternatives to the free instructional materials developed with taxpayer dollars and endorsed by the state teachers' union.

That curriculum instructs 6th graders to learn the 13 guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement; 7th graders on how protesters have breached federal buildings; and higher schoolers to “identify plans of action that people have used to resist, refuse, and create alternatives to oppressive systems,” according to the materials developed by the University of Minnesota’s Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender and Sexuality Studies ([RIDGS](#)).

“Students will be able to explain how race is socially constructed and how that social construction has been used to oppress people of color, specifically in relation to Jim Crow, segregation, and racial covenants,” reads the description for the 11th and 12th-grade Jim Crow of the North course.

The Center of the American Experiment, a Minnesota-based education policy [organization](#) that opposes partisan and race-based curricula, is helping districts find politically neutral alternatives that it says are more like traditional social studies and history electives and less like social justice advocacy guidance.

“The words ethnic studies have been hijacked,” Catrin Wigfall, a policy fellow with the center, told The Epoch Times. “But boards [of education] have more power in this than they might think.”

Additionally, state laws allow parents to review a curriculum and opt their child out of any instruction they find objectionable, in which case the school is required to provide alternative materials, Wigfall said.

The [Minnesota Department of Education](#) defines ethnic studies as an interdisciplinary area of instruction that “analyzes how race and racism have been and continue to be social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to the stratification of other groups.”

The state law requires public schools to incorporate ethnic studies lessons in mandatory social studies courses across all grade levels, in addition to offering a stand-alone ethnic studies elective course for high school juniors and seniors.

In 2023, the Minnesota Department of Education stipulated that the ethnic studies context is expected to be embedded in other subject areas, including math, physical education, and health, as courses are periodically revised.

The Center of the American Experiment argues that those standards habituate angry, inaccurate, and “identity-first” ideological and political perspectives.

By definition, ethnic studies should focus on global histories, cultures, and religions, but the instruction pushed in Minnesota schools forces a polarizing and narrow political worldview, Wigfall said.

“It’s been a bait and switch campaign,” she said.

The center endorses the American Experience [curriculum](#) by the Foundation Against Tolerance and Racism, which Johns Hopkins has approved as a model for ethnic studies instruction, as a suitable alternative to the University of Minnesota’s instructional materials.

In addition, the [1776 Unites](#) free curriculum focuses on historical stories that “celebrate black excellence, reject victimhood culture, and showcase African-Americans who have prospered by embracing America’s founding ideals,” according to its website.

Wigfall said her organization will work with school districts to navigate curriculum choices and the timetable for meeting state requirements across various subject areas.

The center isn’t advocating litigation over the mandate, but local education leaders, under federal Title VI provisions, have legal recourse if they are forced to foster a hostile learning environment under state requirements.

“It will be interesting to see what the rollout looks like,” she said. “When you emphasize tribalism, what does that do to knowledge development?”

Minnesota isn’t the only place grappling with debates surrounding ethnic studies mandates.

The California Department of Education strongly recommends the curricula, but has yet to require them.

The Defending Education parents' organization recently [reported](#) that K–12 districts in 22 states spent more than \$17.5 million since 2017 on “liberated” ethnic studies instruction.

Mitch Siegler, founder of the [THINC Foundation](#), which promotes K–12 curriculum transparency and is closely monitoring California's moves, said his situation is similar to Minnesota's in that consultants and content creators focusing on such ethnic studies collaborate with districts and teacher unions to “promote the only game in town.”

THINC is developing alternative materials that emphasize civics and American history.

“Warts and all,” Siegler said in an email response to The Epoch Times. “And which teaches students to debate complex issues and disagree in an agreeable fashion. That's a far cry from the ideological approach which the ‘liberated’ consultants advocate for.”

The Epoch Times reached out to the Minnesota Department of Education and the University of Minnesota's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

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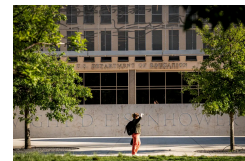
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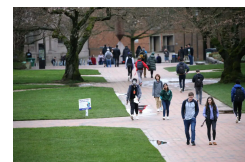
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