



National
Urban League

*Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.*

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Re: Docket ID: ED-2021-OESE-0033

Dear Secretary Cardona,

On behalf of the National Urban League and its 90 local affiliates across 36 states and the District of Columbia, we write in support of the Department's proposed priority to advance projects that incorporate culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments.

The National Urban League is an historic civil rights organization dedicated to lifting barriers to economic empowerment, educational opportunities and the guarantee of civil rights for the underserved in America. The fight for equity is strengthened by a shared understanding of our nation's history, especially the darkest parts of our history. The National Urban League stands in support of the Department of Education prioritizing equity projects that incorporate racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives into teaching and learning.

Our nation is still suffering from a pandemic that has upended our healthcare system and our economy, exposing deep structural inequities in our systems. Communities of color bear the brunt of death, sickness, job loss, eviction, and school closures. Efforts like Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project, which balances the country's history by tracing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans throughout our national narrative, help illuminate why the burdens of this pandemic have been so disproportionately carried by Black Americans. This and other curricula that take into account systemic marginalization, biases, inequities, and discriminatory policy and practice in American history, and centers on the lives of those most harmed, is imperative now more than ever.

A fair depiction of our nation's past is the equitable path forward. Prioritizing projects that incorporate racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives into teaching and learning, is one part of prioritizing equity. As we continue to recover from this inequitable crisis -- and to ensure that future crises do not continue to disparately harm people of color, low-income people, and other historically and systemically marginalized groups -- we must make sure our young people understand the roles that systemic bias and racism in policy and practice have played in American history, and how to be anti-racist as they interact with these systems and with their fellow Americans. The curricula in our schools must reflect the breadth and depth of our Nation's diverse history and the vital role of diversity in our democracy.

In addition to the social importance of this culturally relevant curriculum, culturally relevant teaching is a powerful method for increasing student achievement and engagement. Research from 2017 estimated the causal effects of enrollment in ethnic studies courses and found that the course increased ninth-grade attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23.¹ These results suggest that culturally relevant pedagogy, when implemented with high-fidelity, can provide effective support to at-risk students. Research published in 2016 surveyed 315 6th- through 12th-grade students from across the United States (62% female, 25% White, 25% Latino, 25% African American, and 25% Asian) about their experiences of culturally relevant teaching, cultural socialization, opportunities to learn about other cultures, and opportunities to learn about racism. Culturally relevant teaching was significantly associated with better academic outcomes and enhanced ethnic-racial identity development.² These findings provide support for the effectiveness and importance of culturally relevant teaching in everyday classrooms.

As we devise methods for our education system to best support students returning to in-person learning, after many received hybrid or fully virtual instruction for over a year, schools must be safe and validating learning environments for all young people. This is especially true for those the education system has failed to welcome or serve well historically. We owe our children and ourselves the truth about the past and present, so that we can build an equitable future together. Equity will not happen without effort. Prioritizing projects that incorporate culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments is a start.

Please contact Joi Chaney, Executive Director of the National Urban League's Washington Bureau (jchaney@nul.org) if we can be of further assistance to you on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,



Marc H. Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831216677002>

² <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2158244016660744>