

10 November, 2020

To Whom This May Concern,

The SERC staff did a brilliant job facilitating the development of the African American and Latino studies curriculum (P.A. 19-12); I feel compelled to write a letter of testimony to say so.

I had two roles in the curriculum development process: I served as a member of the Advisory Group as an interested and supportive community member/former educator, and I also served as documentarian, recording the process to produce a video documentary about it.

Starting November 2019, I attended as many focus group meetings and committee meetings as I could, as well as all the Advisory Group meetings. I also corresponded with the SERC team about the documentary, asking for resources, etc. In everything I have experienced and observed, the SERC team has worked to the highest degree of professionalism and excellence.

I left so many meetings in awe of their skillfulness in facilitating groups.

The SERC team held space for emotional discussions, recognizing when committee members needed to share personal stories or process current or past events. They didn't rush, cut short, or dismiss people from sharing, but (somehow!) still managed to keep conversations on track. All voices were valued. And though few students attended committee discussions, the SERC team constantly kept the student interests (expressed through the community survey and focus groups) central in all discussions.

The SERC team negotiated disagreements with grace and diplomacy. Perhaps most impressive to me was how each team member made a visible effort to remain impartial. To say that creating a curriculum like this was "complicated" seems an understatement – so many different interests, challenges, opportunities, constraints; so many different ways of approaching it; so many different decisions to be made. As far as I could see, the SERC team guided participants without disclosing their own feelings about what was best in any given case.

With families home-based during the pandemic, working from home was obviously a challenge at times – but there seemed to be little impact on the quality of the curriculum work. If one SERC team-member had to attend to a child in the middle of facilitating a meeting, her colleague would hop in and transition seamlessly, returning the floor when the first colleague came back on. The SERC team appeared extremely supportive of each other.

SERC did a fantastic job coordinating meetings (many!) for each of the nine committees, pulling everyone together, scheduling and notifying people, being clear with expectations and reminders. They also communicated well between committees, reporting on the work of other

committees and getting all the different groups on the same page. This could have been a sloppy and chaotic process, but the communication was so good and clear, 60 committee members working in small, separate groups were able to work together beautifully as a team – and all in a virtual space. Really amazing.

One major point of contention was regarding whether to separate African American and Latino studies or to integrate them throughout. There was disagreement between the committees on how to best proceed – indeed, it seems to me there isn't a simple answer – and I think that not everyone was happy with the final decision. However, I don't believe that's a reflection on SERC. They navigated well, referring back to the legislation and speaking to the legislators for guidance.

Everyone involved put their heart into this – the SERC team included. There's nothing I think they could have done better. I feel honored and proud to have witnessed this curriculum's development, and I feel proud that Connecticut has a team to handle it so masterfully.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Best wishes,  
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