

September 21, 2020

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to endorse the work of the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to expand curriculum in Connecticut schools to include African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies. I have been honored to be a member of the SERC Advisory Group to support the development of the new course of study. Advocates of multicultural education point to the need to provide minority youth with a historical yet contemporary context for their cultural traditions. In my view, it is equally important for majority populations to learn about and respect cultures other than their own. This is the only way that we can break down the walls of ignorance, suspicion, and distrust.

I am especially pleased to see a focus on the role of African American and Latino innovators and inventors — including women — so that students can be even more proud of their heritage and feel empowered that they also can achieve success.

A key component of student learning is engagement — how interactive are the lesson plans? How can we make learning relevant to the lives of young people? How can we connect curriculum to the reality of students' community and home lives? These are questions that I believe the team has worked hard to answer in positive terms. Designing coursework that does not feel “outside” of student's experience, but rather becomes meaningful within the context of their daily lives provides them with opportunities to connect their learning to events beyond the classroom, including family, church, neighborhood, community and broader contexts.

Educators are always hopeful that class discussions within a given course create openings to larger discussions, sustained over time. The extent to which we can connect the historical struggles of African Americans and Latinos in the United States to the current reexamination of racism in our country will help students use their learning to explore opportunities to bring change and positive action to their communities. Cultural awareness and historical perspectives are not ends, but rather are tools we share with students so that they can understand themselves better, learn to collaborate together, and solve the problems facing our communities together. Curriculum that keeps those goals in mind have great potential for impacting students, their classrooms, their schools, and their communities.

I look forward to the continued work of the SERC as we work together to shine a light on African American and Latino cultures and experiences in our schools.

Sincerely,

Elsa M. Núñez