



Ethnic Studies & Social Justice Standards FAQ

Answering Frequently Asked Questions about our Beliefs, Programs, and Initiatives Related to Ethnicity, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

The Los Alamitos Unified School District Board of Education, administration, and staff are committed to our core belief that to prepare students to be successful in a complex and diverse world we must ensure a safe, nurturing, supportive, and accepting environment. Students should be provided with opportunities to gain an understanding of, and respect for individual and cultural differences, live enriched lives, and be better prepared to work in a global economy and live cooperatively in a diverse society.

Priority Goal #2 of our District Strategic Plan: “We will ensure an inclusive, safe, healthy, secure, and substance-free environment.”

- Mission/Vision: <https://www.losal.org/our-district/mission-vision>
- Belief Statements: <https://www.losal.org/our-district/statement-of-beliefs>
- Priority Goals: <https://www.losal.org/our-district/district-priority-goals>
- Human Relations Advisory Council Webpage: <https://www.losal.org/departments/educational-services/human-relations-taskforce>

As a learning community, we are pursuing these goals and objectives four ways:

- I. Being Proactive and Collaborative by Creating a Human Relations Council
- II. Offering a High School Elective Course in Ethnic Studies
- III. Practicing Age-Appropriate Culturally Responsive Instruction in Classrooms
- IV. Providing the Social Justice Standards to teachers and administrators as a tool to support Culturally Responsive Instruction

Questions about the Human Relations Advisory Council

Q: What is the Human Relations Advisory Council and how did it get started?

A: Over the past three years, the Los Alamitos Unified School District has engaged in an intentional, proactive effort to address societal issues impacting our students and our community. A 35-member Human Relations Task Force rebranded itself as an Advisory Council last year to demonstrate that this was no longer a temporary project, but an ongoing district commitment.

This Human Relations Advisory Council (HRAC) quarterly meetings are open to any Los Alamitos parent/guardian, staff, administrator, community member and two Board members. The HRAC subcommittees remain open to participation to Los Alamitos stakeholders mentioned above. Subcommittees currently in operation are: (1) Human Resources, (2) Parent and Community Education,

(3) Human Relations Programs, (4) Restorative Practices and Discipline, and (5) Communication Resources.

Q: What is the difference between the Ethnic Studies Course, Social Justice Standards, and Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI)?

A: Ethnic studies is a high school elective course offered to juniors and seniors who have previously taken or are concurrently enrolled in a year-long US History course. The Social Justice Standards are guideposts for teachers and administrators — a set of anchor standards used in conjunction with grade level curriculum. CRI is a student-centered approach to teaching to help teachers be mindful of how they are reflecting diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts in their instructional delivery.

Questions about the Ethnic Studies Course

Q: What is an Ethnic Studies course?

A: The field of ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity, with an emphasis on the experiences of people of color in the United States. The course supports college-readiness and rigor for our students. The course deals with the often-overlooked contributions made by people of color to many areas of government, politics, the arts, medicine, and economics. It provides examples of how collective social action can lead to a more equitable and just society in positive ways.

In a society that is rapidly diversifying and becoming more complex, ethnic studies develops skills that enable students to express collective and collaborative thought. The course provides them with interpersonal communication strategies, cultural relevance, and equity-driven skills that include how to:

- Effectively listen to others,
- Give a voice to people in need,
- Cultivate shared power,
- Empathize with the conditions and circumstances of others,
- Select relevant/effective strategies to bring about change,
- Get feedback from those they seek to help,
- Be deliberate, intentional, and aware,
- Organize and build responsible, positive coalitions and collaborative efforts.

Q: Is the Ethnic Studies course a required course for all students?

A: No, it is not mandatory. In Los Alamitos Unified, this is not a mandated or required course. The Board of Education approved Ethnic Studies as one choice to satisfy the high school “g” elective course for students in grades 11 or 12, who have either previously completed or are concurrently enrolled in a year-long US History course. This prerequisite of course enrollment assures that students are engaged in

diverse perspectives on the history of our country. (“Statement of Beliefs”, Los Alamitos Unified School District, <https://www.losal.org/our-district/statement-of-beliefs>).

Q: Has the Ethnic Studies curriculum been approved? Who is developing it?

A: No, the textbook and supplemental resources for the course are currently available for community preview. These resources will be formally presented to the Board of Education at the Tuesday, April 27, 2021, meeting and will remain on preview until the Board considers them for approval at the Tuesday June 1, 2021, Board of Education meeting.

The course was developed by Los Alamitos Unified staff.

Q: Is the Los Alamitos Unified Ethnic Studies course the same as the Model Course on Ethnic Studies proposed by the California Department of Education (CDE)?

A: No, the Los Alamitos Unified course is not the proposed model course from the CDE. Our ethnic studies course has been developed by District staff to be responsive to our student and community needs. It draws from the Orange County Department of Education guidelines, collaboration with other school districts who have created a similar course, curriculum best practices, and the CDE Department of Education framework.

Q: Is the Los Alamitos Unified Ethnic Studies Course aligned with the concept of Critical Race Theory and does it focus on the “oppressed” vs. “oppressors” or white people vs. people of color?

A: It is not aligned with Critical Race Theory. There have been numerous unfounded claims by outside special interest groups that this controversial theory is the foundation of our course. They are using alarmist tactics and misleading rhetoric to distract and confuse the conversation about ethnic studies. Ethnic studies cultivates critical thinking skills to analyze and discuss the societal issues of race, diversity, equity, inclusion, individual and institutional bias, and discrimination.

Care will be taken to ensure that teachers:

- Present topics from multiple points of view and represent diverse stories and opinions within groups (staying within the realm of inclusion and humanizing discourse),
- Have access to teaching resources that represent a range of different perspectives; and
- Develop lessons that are structured so students examine materials from multiple perspectives and come to their own conclusions.

Q: Why should we have an Ethnic Studies course?

A: Ethnic Studies helps bring students and communities with diverse backgrounds together. By affirming the identities and contributions of marginalized groups in our society, Ethnic Studies helps students

expand perspectives and see themselves and each other as part of the narrative of the United States. Most importantly, this helps students see themselves as active agents in the inter-ethnic, bridge-building process we call American life.

Q: What learning objectives will students carry away from the course?

A: Ethnic Studies provides students with understanding of cultural relevance in our society. Students will develop crucial equity-driven interpersonal communication skills and positive ways of expressing collective and collaborative thoughts. The goal of the course is to enable students to:

- Encourage cultural understanding of how different groups have struggled and worked together, highlighting core ethnic studies concepts such as equality, justice, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, etc.
- Promote college readiness by way of critical thinking and applying rigorous analysis of history, systems of oppression, and the status quo in an effort to generate discussions on futurity, and to imagine new possibilities.
- Examine and reflect on the history, struggles, and contributions of diverse groups within the context of historical exclusion, ethnic studies can foster the importance of equity and justice.

Questions about Culturally Responsive Instruction

Q: Why do we need Culturally Responsive Instruction?

A: All students deserve an education that is inclusive and reflects the totality of the human experience. It helps students to appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in the cultures of others. It supports cultural relevance in students over the course of their school experience.

Q: What is Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI)?

A: Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) is inclusive of all experiences our educators, students and families bring to the classroom. CRI is both an asset and research-based approach that makes meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages, and life experiences. These connections help students access rigorous curriculum, develop higher-level academic skills, and see the relevance between what they learn at school and their lives. It includes culturally relevant literature, text, and supplemental materials that are developmentally appropriate in content.

Q: How will this be incorporated in the instructional practices of teachers?

A: Teachers will have access to staff development and coaching on how to apply CRI into grade level lessons.

Questions about Social Justice Standards

Q: What are Social Justice Standards and how are they being used?

A: The Social Justice Standards are available guidelines for teachers to expand and enhance grade level curriculum and can provide support in creating culturally responsive instruction. The Social Justice Standards are anchor standards that are developmentally designed for every stage of K-12 education. The Social Justice Standards can support administrators in making schools more inclusive, equitable, and safe for all students by reducing acts of bullying, prejudice, and minimizing conflict escalation.

Q: Is this a curriculum the district is adopting?

A: The Social Justice Standards are not a curriculum. They are a tool that can be used as a guide for teachers and administrators.

Q: Why are these standards being considered for use by Los Alamitos Unified?

A: We serve a diverse student and family population in our district. Our teachers are asking for tools to be able to address a variety of student driven questions and topics. These tools support culturally responsive instruction.

Q: Does Los AI USD have a formal relationship with the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)?

A: The district doesn't have any relationship with SPLC. We, like many other school districts across the state and the nation, utilize the standards as a resource for helping to create safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Q: If the board adopts the Social Justice Standards, does that mean they are adopting all of Teaching Tolerance resources?

A: No. The Board is not formally adopting all materials provided by Teaching Tolerance. The Board of Education is previewing for the adoption of the Social Justice Standards as a stand-alone supplemental resource for teachers and administrators.