



February 23, 2021

Representative Ruth Richardson  
Education Policy Committee, Chair  
463 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: **Support for HF 950 Ethnic Studies Provisions**

Dear Chair Richardson and Committee Members,

The Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) is a social justice organization with 4,000 network leaders who span at least 20 of Minnesota's 40+ Asian ethnic groups. CAAL is also an active member of the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition - composed of 30 community members and advocacy organizations. On behalf of the undersigned organizations that represent many different Asian American ethnic communities in Minnesota, we support the following provisions in House File 950 that places Minnesota on the right path towards adopting ethnic studies:

- Ethnic Studies Curriculum (Lines 40.23-40.26): Grounding the work in common language and a definition ensures that it is clear what is meant when we say "ethnic studies" and what to look for as schools consider implementing "ethnic studies curriculum" around the state.
- Culturally-Relevant Methodologies (Line 41.30): Requiring districts to incorporate "access to culturally relevant or ethnic studies curriculum" into their comprehensive, long-term strategic plans is a great start in ensuring that districts plan long-term and incorporate a framework for adopting, implementing, and expanding ethnic studies to include a wide range of topics.
- Long-Term Planning (Lines 55.16-55.18): We support the inclusion of ethnic studies as a component of what districts may include in long-term planning.

Asian American students are 61,590<sup>1</sup> of all students in Minnesota and are 28% of Dual Language Learners, just after Hispanic students (31.5%). As you know, the Asian Minnesotan community is diverse and not a monolith. When data is disaggregated we see that while Asian Minnesotans graduate from high school at a rate similar to white students, their ACT scores have remained significantly lower, lingering at an 18 average for at least the last 8 years. It is even lower at 16 in Minneapolis Public Schools. At that score it is likely that these students will be put in remedial courses in higher education. Additionally, as COVID-19 continues, we have heard from parents and students about the growing gaps in technology, academic and social emotional support. The learning loss grows rapidly and larger for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian students, especially for low-income, limited English, and first generation students.

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<sup>1</sup> MDE Report Card: [https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--999999000000\\_groupType--state\\_p--9](https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--999999000000_groupType--state_p--9)

As we contemplate what it will take to address the current crises and meet the educational opportunity gap, **it is critical that the state move to ensure that all students receive a holistic education that is relevant in its curriculum and pedagogy through ethnic studies.** A growing body of research shows that ethnic studies enables students of color to see themselves, and in turn, become more likely to succeed academically. It also develops all students as they learn about their cultures and histories, as well as their peers.<sup>2</sup>

While we appreciate the initial steps that the Governor has taken on this issue, we urge the Education Policy Committee to go a step further and incorporate the ethnic studies provisions in [House File 704](#), which:

- Requires every school district to incorporate ethnic studies into their social studies curriculum, and that one or more Ethnic Studies courses must include the following topics:
  - Latinx Studies;
  - African American Studies;
  - Asian American Studies;
  - Indigenous / First Nations Studies; or
  - Ethnic Studies 101.
  - Ethnic studies courses may also focus specifically on a particular group of national or ethnic origin, including Hmong Studies or Somali Studies.
- Requires the Commissioner of Education to adopt rules for statewide ethnic studies curriculum.
- Creates a 25-member ethnic studies task force composed of members of the community, students, teachers, and other diverse stakeholders, and more.

We can no longer talk about education equity without including ethnic studies because Asian Minnesotan students along with Black, Indigenous and Latinx students cannot continue to be excluded in curriculum. We urge you and the committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Linda Her, Executive Director, ***Asian American Organizing Project***

Ange Hwang, Executive Director, ***Asian Media Access (AMA)***

Bo Thao-Urabe, Executive and Network Director, ***Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL)***

Gregory King, Leadership Team, ***Filipinx for Immigrant rights and Racial justice MN (FIRM)***

Mai Nhia Vang Huizel, Interim Executive Director, ***Hmong Museum***

Vinicius Taguchi, President, ***Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) - Twin Cities Chapter***

Sunny Chanthanouvong, Executive Director, ***Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota***

Meg Layese, ***Philippine Study Group of Minnesota (PSGM)***

Chanida Phaengdara Potter, Executive Director & Community Architect, ***The SEAD Project (Southeast Asian Diaspora)***

Hue Pham, Executive Director, ***Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota (VSS)***

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<sup>2</sup> Dee, T. & Penner, E. (January 2017). "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum," American Educational Research Journal, vol 54(1), pages 127-166.