



Education Committee

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Implementing Cultural Diversity of School Curriculum

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Position Statement:

The Iowa Youth Congress supports legislation that the Iowa Board of Education should pass legislation regarding the implementation of a more culturally diverse curriculum in grades 3rd through 8th.

Position

It is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress that the Iowa legislature should pass legislation regarding the implementation of a more culturally diverse curriculum starting from grade 3 to grade 8. By implementing content that covers diverse cultures and history, increased cultural tolerance can be created within schools across Iowa. This integration of information will be essential in forming generations of culturally minded citizens of Iowa. By mandating public schools to teach a more inclusive curriculum, it can be ensured that Iowa children are active members of a community working towards a more accepting society.

Current Situation

Eurocentric curriculum affects students' learning aptitudes and ability to understand others. The implicit bias towards members of minority groups affects their educational process. Students of different backgrounds and ethnicities experience this implicit bias meanwhile being underrepresented in the school curriculum as a whole. The National Museum of African American History and Culture found that "on average, only one to two lessons, or 8 to 9 percent of total class time, are devoted to Black history." Revision of this by the state is needed in hopes of improving in our current education system. According to senior policy associate at The Century Foundation, Kimberly Quick, our schools "not only reflect our current values as a nation but also reveal the values that we anticipate passing along to the next generation of Americans" (Quick). The state must correct these teachings to better surround our cultural values and respect those who are a part of a diverse cultural background or ethnicity.

Rationale

Public schools are becoming significantly more diverse with white students making up less than 50% of the population ("The Importance of Diversity in the Classroom"). In the 2019-2020

school year, nonwhite students in Iowa made up 25.5% of the population, up from 9.8% of the population during the 2000-2001 school year (Education Statistics).

Public schools' curriculum should actively be representative and inclusive of their diverse student population. For many in Iowa, it has been difficult to be accepting of others due to the lack of reinforcement in their education; this is because their education has not included narratives from other cultures that lie outside of their perception of normal. For many others in the state having inaccurate or, no curriculum surrounding their ethnicity or culture is disheartening and alienating. An article published by Psychology Today concludes that "alienation can have adverse effects on young people and lead to a sense of disconnectedness from school" and "students who feel alienated are also more likely to develop depressive symptoms" (Henderson).

It is important to start discussing these topics with students at a younger age. Research has shown that diverse classrooms help students to develop intercultural empathy and understanding. An amicus brief filed by Brown University in the Fisher II case discusses how "diversity encourages students to question their assumptions, to understand that wisdom may be found in unexpected voices, and to gain an appreciation of the complexity of today's world" (Wells). Implementation of curriculum that encourages students to reach beyond what they know would be more effective at a young age because they are better able to implement their newfound knowledge with more confidence and understanding.

Recommended Action

As Iowa's school non-white population gradually increases, the Iowa education curriculum must accommodate for this change. We recommend that the Iowa education committee draft a curriculum for new units which will replace units heavily focused on European history currently in the curriculum. These new units would cover topics that showcase other ethnic groups, races, and nationalities and would replace current units centered around Eurocentrism that is repeated throughout the curriculum. Providing visibility to minority groups and members of underrepresented cultures will provide them with knowledge of their heritage and confidence in their identity. These new units would be beneficial at school and in the workplace later in life because it would help all children be more accepting, understanding, and knowledgeable about others. We also find it obligatory for the addition of a commitment to Equitable Instruction and Culturally Responsive Curriculum in the Iowa Core Universal Values, We propose that this curriculum be mandated state-wide by the fall of 2024. This would give sufficient time to create an effective curriculum that gives students age-appropriate awareness of race and cultural differences.

Sources

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