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An Evaluation of Critical Ethnic Studies in Saint Paul Public Schools: Year 1 District-Wide Implementation

August 2023

Prepared by:
Alyssa Parr, PhD
Eskender Yousuf, PhD
Molly Illes, PhD

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How to Cite this Report

Parr, A., Yousuf, E., & Illes, M. (2023). *An Evaluation of Critical Ethnic Studies in Saint Paul Public Schools: Year 1 District-Wide Implementation*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

Acknowledgements

This program evaluation was carried out in partnership between Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) and the University of Minnesota's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality (RIDGS) and Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). The work was approved by the SPPS Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA) Department and funded by RIDGS, through a University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) Research Agenda Grant and a University of Minnesota Interdisciplinary Collaborative Workshop Grant.

We'd like to thank our partners, including Mouakong Vue and Xue Xiong from the SPPS Ethnic Studies Department; Maijue Lochungvu from the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL); Dr. Keith Mayes, Dr. Jimmy Patiño, Dr. Erika Rodriguez, and Jacob (Coby) Oertel from RIDGS; and members of the SPPS Critical Ethnic Studies Collaboration Circle and Advisory Committee, and REA Department. This evaluation would not have been possible without their efforts.

Contact Information

Alyssa Parr, PhD
Research Associate
Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement
College of Education and Human Development
University of Minnesota
1954 Buford Avenue, Suite 425
Saint Paul, MN 55108
Telephone: (612) 625-7240
Email: akparr@umn.edu

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Executive Summary

In 2022-2023, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) first implemented a Critical Ethnic Studies (CES) course district-wide that was co-designed with students, educators, and community members. Almost 2,460 SPPS students enrolled in this course in 2022-2023 and 70% of these students successfully completed the course, earning full credit. Students serving on the Student Engagement Advisory Board (SEAB) advocated for and designed the course to center the stories and lived experiences of ethnically marginalized students and communities, teach critical thinking, and help address issues including a lack of diversity in advanced courses, negative effects of Student Resource Officers (SROs) within schools, and poor mental health and accessibility.

This executive summary presents an overview of findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of the CES course implemented in the 2022-2023 school year. The evaluation was conducted through a partnership between SPPS and the University of Minnesota's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality (RIDGS) and Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) and it provided the first snapshot of the CES course in SPPS.

The purpose of the evaluation was to better understand course implementation and experiences. Evaluation activities included interviewing former student advocates; conducting district-wide teacher and student surveys; interviewing administrators, teachers, and students at two case-study sites; and attending Professional Development workshops, SPPS Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee meetings, Teacher Cohort meetings, Family Forums, and a Student Showcase.

Summary of Findings

Findings from this evaluation suggest that, in many classes, the CES course achieved the goals of centering the stories and lived experiences of ethnically marginalized students and communities as well as teaching critical thinking. Students, for example, learned about their own and their peers' identities and cultures, studied resistance movements led by people of color and marginalized communities, built community within their CES classes, and challenged themselves to learn from their peers, even when they disagreed.

Most teachers received support from the SPPS Ethnic Studies Department and their School Administrators that helped them feel prepared and successful in teaching the CES course. Additionally, teachers shared that students were engaged in the course as well as learned and frequently built confidence in themselves as a result of the course. A lack of time made it difficult for teachers to do everything they wished to with the course and limited accessibility of the content made it particularly challenging for students learning English.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the findings from this evaluation, we offer recommendations in four areas. In terms of *system-wide curriculum adjustments*, SPPS should consider expanding critical ethnic studies beyond a one-semester standalone course by integrating it within all disciplinary content in the district as well as creating a year-long CES-focused course and introducing students to the content in earlier grades. *Course content modifications* to consider include featuring content about a broader range of ethnically marginalized groups (e.g., Asian, Indigenous, Karen, and

Latiné communities), making the content more accessible for students learning English, and including an explicit community-engaged component to the course. *Additional supports for teachers* might include providing more time to explore and build upon the curriculum provided and developing strategies for communicating with families about the CES course in culturally responsive ways. Finally, *future research and/or evaluation* recommendations include measuring the return on investment and the course's effects on students, schools, and the broader community over time.

Conclusion

Overall, this evaluation offered critical insights into the history and evolution, core curriculum components, student and teacher experiences, student outcomes, along with support for and barriers to the success of the CES course at SPPS. Our hope is that the findings from this evaluation provide formative feedback for program improvement in SPPS and considerations for other districts beginning to offer or expanding ethnic studies in their schools. Additionally, this study suggests the need for more future research and evaluation to inform course improvements and understand long-term implications of this course on students' schooling experiences.

Introduction

Ethnic studies is the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States (SPPS Ethnic Studies Department, 2022). The Ethnic Studies Movement began in the 1960s Civil Rights era, leading to the development of ethnic studies courses in K-12 and higher education systems. While ethnic studies courses have been taught across the country for decades, including in Minnesota, students, educators, and community leaders have recently advocated for the expansion and requirement of ethnic studies courses in K-12 public education systems. Locally, in Minnesota, both the Minneapolis Public Schools and Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) have passed ethnic studies graduation requirements for all high school graduates beginning with the graduating class of 2025. These policies would not have been put in place without the efforts of many community members and local organizations, including the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition, Youth for Ethnic Studies, the Student Engagement and Advancement Board, Parent Advisory Boards, UNIDOS, Navigate MN, the Coalition of Asian American Leaders, the Asian American Organizing Project, Education 4 Liberation MN, Education Evolving and the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers, along with many others.

The SPPS Critical Ethnic Studies initiative was approved in December of 2021, implemented in some schools during the 2021-2022 school year, and implemented in all schools within the district in the 2022-2023 school year. The initiative was primarily implemented by the district's Ethnic Studies (ES) department and included a Critical Ethnic Studies (CES) course that all 10th grade students were required to take. The SPPS ES department also provided professional development for CES teachers and hosted events to engage families and showcase students' CES capstone projects.

This report presents an evaluation of the first year of district-wide implementation of the SPPS ethnic studies initiative. This mixed-method evaluation aimed to document the student advocacy that led to the ethnic studies initiative, components of the initiative, and experiences of students and teachers involved in SPPS' first district-wide implementation of the required CES course. This evaluation is the first snapshot of this ethnic studies graduation requirement in SPPS and was conducted through a partnership between SPPS and the University of Minnesota's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender, and Sexuality (RIDGS) and Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Our hope is that this partnership and initial evaluation will lead to further in-depth and longitudinal research to inform improvements to the CES course and understand long-term effects of the CES course through and beyond students' high school graduation.

Although this district-wide evaluation of ethnic studies in SPPS is the first of its kind in Minnesota, researchers have been exploring ethnic studies courses in K-12 schools for decades. Perhaps the first most comprehensive review of literature on ethnic studies courses was Sleeter's (2011) piece summarizing the academic and social benefits of ethnic studies at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Sleeter (2011) found that students experienced positive academic and social outcomes from participating in ethnic studies courses. For example, students who took ethnic studies courses were more engaged academically, had higher academic achievement, felt

personally empowered, and had a greater understanding of and appreciation for the backgrounds of other students. In a more recent review, Sleeter and Zavala (2020) found that further research on ethnic studies has shown that Black, Brown, and Indigenous students who took ethnic studies had higher engagement in school, academic achievement, ethnic identity development, sense of empowerment, and chances of graduating from high school and going to college. White students were more likely to have positive racial attitudes when they had taken ethnic studies. The benefits of ethnic studies for student engagement in school, high school graduation, and college attendance were further confirmed by Bonilla et al. (2021) who specifically studied the outcomes of ethnic studies for students with low grade point averages (GPAs).

Researchers have also explored ethnic studies curricula. In fact, Sleeter and Zavala (2020) found that most of the curricula they reviewed were grounded in the knowledges and perspectives of racially marginalized groups, which is central to ethnic studies. However, attention to criticality, reclaiming cultural identities, intersectionality and multiplicity, positioning students as intellectuals, and community engagement was less consistent, despite the importance of such approaches to the pedagogy of ethnic studies (De Los Ríos et al. 2015; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Furthermore, Sacramento (2019) recently highlighted the importance of critical professional development, financial support, and course release time in supporting teachers of ethnic studies courses. These studies offer valuable insights into the benefits and successful implementation of ethnic studies courses in K-12 education systems. However, much of that research has taken place in the southwestern United States. Additional research and evaluation is needed to further our understanding of ethnic studies as it is expanded in K-12 education systems in other regions, such as the midwestern United States.

The 2022-2023 Evaluation of Critical Ethnic Studies in SPPS

Between June and September 2022, program evaluators at CAREI designed an evaluation plan along with members of the SPPS ES Department and RIDGS. We also attended Ethnic Studies Professional Development workshops for SPPS educators to get a full understanding of the goals and methods of the courses. This also allowed CAREI evaluators to build relationships with the teachers so that our planned evaluation would be a project of cooperation with SPPS, not an intrusion. Additionally, we attended select meetings of the SPPS Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, composed of SPPS administrators and community members, in order to ensure that our evaluation plan was responsive to the context and focus of CES in SPPS. Attending the two Family Forums also enabled the evaluation team to interact with CES teachers during the year.

The evaluation of the SPPS CES course focused on the history and evolution of CES at SPPS as well as student and teacher experiences in the course. We gathered formative feedback to improve future course experiences and assess fidelity of implementation. The evaluation centered student and teacher voices to help non-participants understand the experience. The evaluation questions were as follows:

- (1) What is the history and evolution of CES at SPPS?
- (2) What are core components of the CES course?
- (3) How is the CES curriculum experienced by 10th grade students at SPPS high schools?

- (4) In what ways, if any, do students change and grow as a result of the course content?
- (5) How did the course differ from teacher to teacher?
- (6) How did the systems (district, school, and classroom) support students and teachers? What were the barriers?
- (7) What formative feedback do students, teachers, and administrators offer to support future course development and delivery?

Methods

The mixed-methods approach used in this evaluation centered student and teacher voices to help understand the experience of participating in or teaching CES at SPPS during the 2022-2023 school year. Our approach involved gathering appropriate information from multiple sources, including school leaders, teachers, students, events, and curriculum materials. Through this approach, we attended to how SPPS and RIDGS would use the data (Utilization-Focused Evaluation; Patton, 2011), the evolving nature of the programming (Developmental Evaluation; Patton, 2010), and the course roots in identity development and the potential of the course to be transformative for students, teachers, and schools (Transformative Evaluation; Mertens, 2008).

The evaluation team submitted a proposal to the SPPS Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA) department and received approval before gathering any data. The team also submitted an application to the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB), which designated this evaluation project as “not research involving human subjects” based on Department of Health and Human Services and Food and Drug Administration regulations because the purpose focused on providing feedback to support program improvement. Therefore, IRB oversight was not required.

For all data collection, participants were asked to sign consent forms prior to participation. In the case of student surveys, parents and guardians were sent opt-out forms to return if they preferred their student not participate. For interviews with students, parents also signed and returned consent forms prior to the interviews taking place. The consent forms for students and consent/opt-out forms for families were translated into Karen, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. All data were stored on UMN’s Box secure storage platform and only accessible to the evaluation team for this project.

Interviews with Former Student Advocates

To understand the history and evolution of CES at SPPS, evaluators conducted interviews with three former SPPS students who led the grassroots movement for CES at SPPS. The interviews took place via Zoom and with a duration of no more than one hour. The interviews were recorded and transcripts were generated for qualitative analysis. Interview participants received a \$10 gift card for their participation.

Preliminary Curriculum and Extant Data Review

The evaluation team reviewed the CES curriculum developed by SPPS staff to understand the nature of the information shared with each teacher. This review helped us understand and define the program being evaluated, as well as develop baseline expectations for course implementation. The evaluation team also gathered statistics including total students enrolled and counts of students who completed the course provided by SPPS.

Student Survey

All students who took CES in the 2022-2023 school year were invited to participate in a survey. Items on the survey were primarily developed by the CAREI evaluation team along with feedback from project partners (i.e., SPPS and RIDGS staff) and the SPPS Critical Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee. Some items were based on the Student Measure of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Dickson et al., 2016) and the Teacher Power Use Scale (Vlčková et al., 2015). To reach students in an authentic way, a former student who was part of the effort to bring CES to SPPS recorded a brief video message encouraging students to take the survey. The brief, five-ten minute survey was translated into Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Spanish. The survey link was emailed by the SPPS ES Department on May 1st, 2023 and students were provided with a few email reminders to complete the survey. The student survey was administered using the University of Minnesota's web-based Qualtrics platform. Survey responses were anonymous. Each student who completed the survey was entered into a raffle for one of four \$25 gift cards. In total, 744 students responded to the survey between May 1st and June 6th, 2023. Data from the survey was downloaded, saved to Box (the University's secure storage system), and analyzed to provide descriptive statistics and data visualizations.

Teacher Survey

All CES teachers were sent a survey to provide feedback about teaching the course during the 2022-2023 school year. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the experience of teaching CES, gather feedback about what teachers felt worked well and what they plan to change for next year, and to compile feedback and themes across teachers to improve the course for future students. Similar to the student survey, items were primarily developed by the CAREI evaluation team along with feedback from project partners (i.e., SPPS and RIDGS staff) and the SPPS Critical Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee. Additionally, some items were based on the Student Measure of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Dickson et al., 2016) to align with the items posed on the student survey regarding culturally responsive teaching. The survey link was first shared by the CAREI evaluation team in a Teacher Cohort meeting on March 16th, 2023. Teachers had the opportunity to begin the survey during that meeting. A follow up email and reminders were then sent to teachers by the SPPS ES Department. The 15-20 minute survey was administered through the University of Minnesota's web-based Qualtrics platform. The survey was anonymous. In total, 20 out of approximately 30 teachers responded to the survey between March 16th and April 3rd, 2023. Data from the survey was downloaded, saved to Box (the University's secure storage system), and analyzed using descriptive statistics and data visualizations.

Case Studies

Due to the large number of schools and students participating in CES at SPPS in 2022-23, two schools were chosen to participate in additional qualitative data collection. Schools were chosen using a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) to identify schools with leadership, teachers, and students who have information-rich perspectives to contribute to the evaluation. The evaluation team worked with the SPPS ES staff to identify potential case study schools. The case studies consisted of tiered interviews including a 20-30 minute interview with the principal to share their perceptions of the CES course and how teachers and students engaged with the course. Using a snowball sampling approach, each principal was asked to identify one or two model CES teacher(s) from their school. The evaluation team then conducted a 20-30 minute

interview with the teacher(s) to gather their perspective on teaching CES this year. The evaluation team then asked the teacher(s) to nominate two or three students who were engaged in the CES class this year and would be willing to participate in a group or individual interview. Student participants had a parent or guardian sign a consent form prior to their interview. Interviews were conducted in groups of two or three students, or one-on-one per the student's request. Interview participants received a \$10 gift card for their participation.

Observations

Evaluators attended and observed a few CES Professional Development Workshops in August 2022, Family Forums in October 2022 and April 2023, a CES Teacher Professional Development Cohort meeting in March 2023, and the Spring Student Showcase in June 2023. When observing, evaluators focused on listening and taking brief field notes. These observations offered insights into family, student, and teacher perspectives on and experiences with CES in SPPS.

Findings

The History and Evolution of the SPPS Ethnic Studies Program

The history and evolution of CES at SPPS originated from student demands and SPPS curriculum needs. This initiative was driven by a group of students aiming to uplift and amplify the voice of their peers within the district. We speak to the connection between the Student Engagement Advisory Board (SEAB) and the ethnic studies initiative, provide a brief timeline, and highlight how students experienced personal growth as a result of their engagement with this endeavor. Lastly, we mention some challenges and barriers that these students described in relation to the development of CES in SPPS.

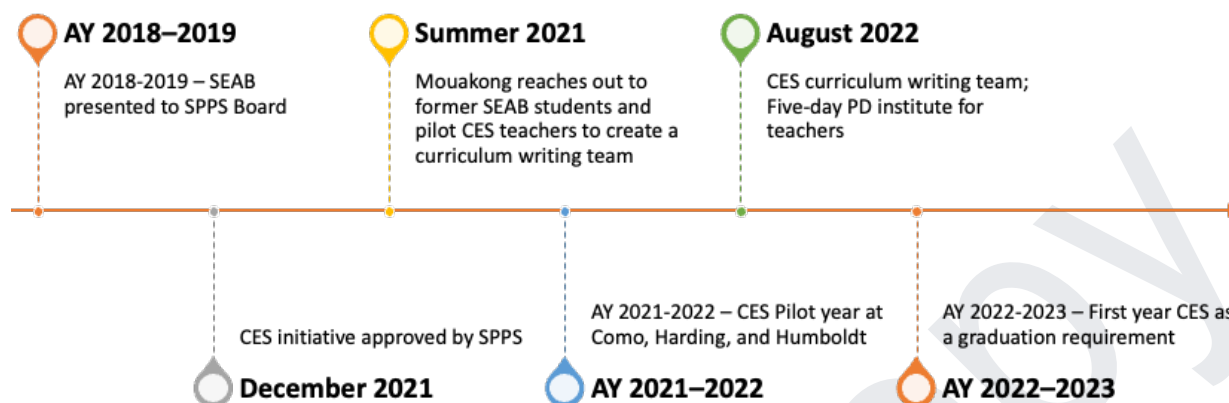
The Student Engagement Advisory Board (SEAB)

SEAB is a centerpiece of the history and evolution of CES at SPPS. This was echoed in all interviews with alumni of SPPS who were actively involved in SEAB. As defined by a former student, SEAB was a student-run group “that work[ed] with the [SPPS] Board and the superintendent, to really try to amplify student voice. We [didn't] want to talk on behalf of the student body, but we want[ed] to use our platform to really uplift voices within SPPS.” This group lived out this mission by advocating for changes to improve the experiences of students within their district. SEAB students first collected and analyzed data from current students to understand their needs. Then, SEAB students presented their findings to the school board and superintendent with recommendations. Some topics included the lack of diversity within AP and IB classes, Student Resource Officers (SROs) within schools, mental health, and accessibility. Regarding ethnic studies, these students felt it was:

a way to indirectly address a lot of these issues at once...we really saw ethnic studies being a tool to improve a lot these [issues]...it worked out very well, because we knew that we couldn't address each of these individually, but ethnic studies in a lot of ways indirectly impacted a lot of the areas that we had, like all wanted to focus on.

Thus, SEAB presented the Ethnic Studies proposal to the SPPS school board in 2019 and advocated for its implementation in SPPS schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Timeline of the SPPS Ethnic Studies Initiative



District Curriculum: CES Requirement

The ethnic studies requirement at SPPS was created because students expressed a desire for curriculum content that reflects their experiences, particularly for marginalized students. SEAB played a pivotal role in *labeling* and *defining* ethnic studies for SPPS. A former student defined ethnic studies as two-fold, “one, the center presence of people of color in the curriculum that's being taught, and then two, the teaching of critical thinking.” Importantly, ethnic studies as a concept was nothing new, as one former SEAB member states, “[ethnic studies] was something that students of color have been talking about for a long time, especially students of color...we weren't hearing our histories, weren't seeing ourselves represented.” Therefore, this CES requirement served as a vessel to center the stories and lived experiences of people of color and marginalized communities.

SEAB Students' Change and Growth

These former students also mentioned their own change and growth as a result of their engagement with SEAB and advocating for the CES requirement. More specifically, they detailed that this process made them realize the power of their voice and had implications on their future career/education trajectories. See excerpts below:

This gave me more confidence to be able to challenge and question authority and people in positions of power, especially like with the whole like, “oh, you know, like students, they just like, sit and learn and like, take in all the information.” But actually like we have a lot of embodied knowledge, a lot of valuable knowledge that we should tell everybody. You know we should tell the community we should tell the world and I feel like this process definitely made me a lot more more confident. And being able to like [another former student] said, express myself, but specifically challenge people in positions of authority.

It's like I already have those skills. I don't think this as a skill, more sort of like a paradigm shift. I think that's even more powerful than a skill, in recognizing that I can hold my institution accountable through my stories, through my voice.

I want to be a critical ethnic studies educator in high school. So I mean, like I'm probably going to go back to teach in Minnesota just because I think that for me would be the full circle moment like I was here from like basically the beginning. I wrote this curriculum to be able to go back to the SPPS district and like teach this course like I feel like that would you know that would definitely be full circle. So yeah, it impacted every single aspect of my career goals.

I think ethnic studies really allowed me to see careers in which I was able to do like financial literacy work within education or to do policy work within administration level of education. So I think without that [experience], I definitely wouldn't have found that. And so I do want to teach directly after college. And so I don't see that, being a lifelong career of mine. But I do also think that ethnic studies has really influenced me to get in a school and teach for several years first.

Challenges and Barriers

Lastly, former students discussed some institutional challenges and barriers experienced along the way. The most significant issues discussed related to the administrative process of implementing CES within SPPS. The students we interviewed felt that there was a lot of “waiting around” after they presented the ethnic studies initiative to the SPPS board. Though they felt supported and heard after their presentation, they expressed frustrations with the slow paced administrative process. Additionally, students had “complicated thoughts” related to the outcome of the course requirement. Overall, they were satisfied with CES becoming a graduation requirement within SPPS, however, they felt it met only half of their request to the board. Initially, they presented a two-fold proposal that advocated for ethnic studies as a standalone course and integrated within all other disciplinary content (e.g., Math, Physics, Chemistry). As one student indicated, “it’s a small victory to have CES as a requirement, but there’s still so much work to be done.”

The 2022-2023 SPPS Ethnic Studies Program

In the following paragraphs, we summarize the key components of the SPPS Ethnic Studies Program in 2022-2023. This includes the summer institute for teachers, community engagement events (i.e., family forums and a student showcase), and the CES course curriculum.

Summer Institute

To prepare staff to teach the new course, the SPPS ES Department hosted a week-long professional development workshop, the SPPS Ethnic Studies Summer Institute, in August 2022. In the spirit of collaboration and community work, which actively moves away from vacuumed operations in silos, SEAB alumni were invited to emcee the Institute. Community members of SPPS and the Ethnic Studies community were invited to attend such as SPPS Board Members, and Ethnic Studies Community Collaborative members. The Institute featured an Ethnic Studies Youth Panel and an Ethnic Studies Higher Ed Panel. Guest speakers included a Dakota Elder who offered a brief history of the Dakota people; SPPS Superintendent, Dr. Joe Gothard; Artist and Poet, Joe Davis; and members from The Irreducible Grace Foundation. Tuesday and

Thursday mornings were designated for off-site community externships in which teachers engaged with community members in various organizations. Community externships were intentionally chosen to reflect the predominantly Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color (BIPOC) student body as well as support BIPOC community programs and initiatives. The externship activities were followed by a gathering back on site for lunch and “cluster” small group professional development discussions.

The Institute also hosted several workshops. The workshops were led by Ethnic Studies experts, SPPS ES leaders and community members, including Dr. Curtis Acosta, Dr. Brian Lozenski, Kurt RuKim, Sylvia De Shazo, Liz Doyle, Jose Alvillar, Malachi Raymond, Atquezali Quiroz, Xue Xiong, Lyle Dandridge, along with MN Ethnic Studies Coalition Members, Youth 4 Ethnic Studies Coalition Members, restorative practices experts, Coalition of Asian American Leaders members, and SPPS leaders. During the workshops, teachers were offered tools and resources to develop their course content, including the CES framework with the Seven Principles, and examples of how to incorporate the principles into lessons. Recognizing that each teacher has unique lived experiences, the workshops provided the framework, but teachers were encouraged to draw on their creativity and experiences to develop their class activities.

Community Engagement Events

During the first year of the new course requirement, the SPPS CES Department hosted multiple community engagement opportunities including two Family Forums and a Student Showcase. Recognizing that families and the broader community may not have information about the CES course or that students and families may have feedback about the required course, the staff organized the events to offer a space for sharing information and authentic dialogue about the course. The ES Department ensured all communications about the family forums were translated along with QR code for audio language support. Additionally, there were language interpreters available at both family forums. The ES Department was intentional about trying to make information as accessible as possible to family and community members.

Family Forums. The first Family Forum took place on Monday, October 17, 2022. All families of students who were taking the CES course in the fall semester were invited. Pizza, salad, and fruit were served at both forums. Xue Xiong and Mouakong Vue presented background information about the evolution of the CES requirement, shared information about the course content including the Seven Principles, incorporated small group discussions, and large group discussion to address questions and hear feedback from students, families, and community members. Approximately 40 students, teachers, administrators, family, and community members attended. Feedback from the first Family Forum participants was gathered on posters mounted on the walls in an effort to acknowledge and highlight the conversations and concerns brought up at the Forum.

The second Family Forum was hosted on Wednesday, April 12, 2023, for families of students taking CES during the spring semester. There were about 50 students, teachers, administrators, family members, and community members in attendance. In contrast with the first Family Forum, the second event was highly interactive with a Four Corners activity that featured a series of questions with various responses posted in each corner of the room. Attendees were asked to move toward the response that they identified mostly closely with. The purpose of this activity

was to give participants a taste of what the CES curriculum is like. It also offered opportunities for participants to interact with many different people in attendance. The facilitators presented information about the CES course content, shared an exemplar student capstone project, and incorporated time for questions and feedback.

Student Showcase. The Student Showcase took place at Washington Tech Magnet High School on Saturday, June 10th, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event attracted students, families, teachers, administrators, and members of the community to gather and celebrate the first year of the required CES course. The purpose of the event was not only to celebrate, but also to give students a space to express what they learned in the course and talk about how they might use what they learned in the future. Approximately 72 people attended, including 26 students, 18 educators, the SPPS Superintendent, a SPPS School Board member, one alumnus, 8 parents/family members, 14 community members, and 3 artists/presenters. The event activities included CES student capstone projects on display in the Great Hall; student capstone presentation workshops; keynote speakers including SPPS Superintendent, Dr. Joe Gothard, and former student and SEAB member, Ntxheb (Xe) Chang; interactive activities; an open microphone opportunity for students to speak; arts and expressive activities; food; and a raffle. Further details regarding student capstone projects are summarized later in this report.

Curriculum Overview

The SPPS CES curriculum was informed by curricula for several Ethnic Studies programs throughout the United States and was developed collaboratively by the SPPS ES Department, former students, community members, and teachers. The curriculum was anchored in four standards:

- S1) **Examine** the personal and historical development of identity and its intersectionalities, including concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.
- S2) **Identify, analyze, and celebrate** the histories and contributions to society by racial and ethnic groups or an individual within a group (especially as communities of color and marginalized groups).
- S3) **Examine** the diverse historical and contemporary leaders, groups, events, and locations within Minnesota and other local communities especially as they relate to justice and equity and how they have impacted communities of color.
- S4) **Examine and recognize** individuals' own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice in order to collectively heal, transform, and strengthen their communities.

These standards were covered across five units addressing various lessons relating to CES. Unit 1A was an introduction to ethnic studies and Unit 1B focused on family origins, identity, and narrative. In Unit 2, classes covered systems of power and oppression. Unit 3 focused on resistance and liberation. Finally, Unit 4 covered transformation, hope, action, and change.

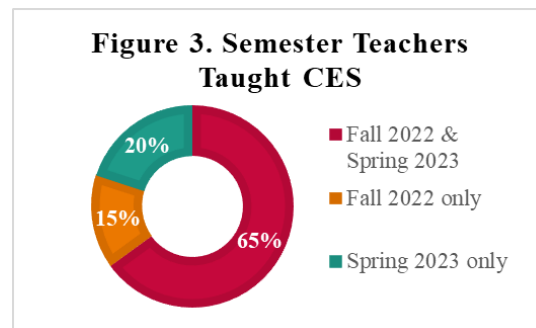
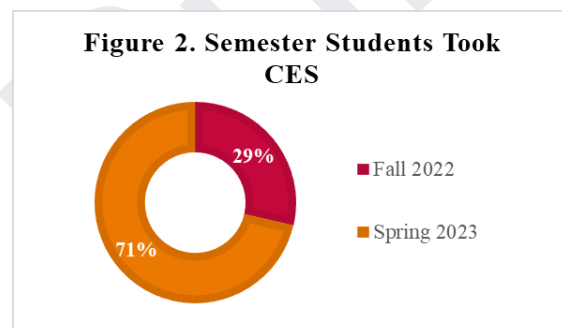
A central component of the CES curriculum and focus of the final Capstone Project was the seven principles of CES. These included:

- (1) **Self-Love** - Reflect on one’s worth and accept my own inherent value. Develop an understanding of “who I am and where I am from” as a key to my personal growth and self-acceptance;
- (2) **Honor** - Honor Indigenous, Black, and communities of color by providing space to share stories of their struggle and resistance, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth;
- (3) **Community** - Build and be in community by accessing and sharing in our cultural wealth;
- (4) **Critical Consciousness** - Actively question, challenge, and expose the world’s systems and operations in order to recognize and analyze systems of inequality;
- (5) **Resistance** - Resist all systems of oppressive power rooted in racism through collective action and change;
- (6) **Hope** - Continue to believe and have faith that things will get better in order to heal from intergenerational trauma through collective hope and perseverance; and
- (7) **Visualization** - Imagine and build new possibilities that promote collective narrative of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

For each unit, students were asked to complete journaling activities to help them reflect on the content. All lessons drew on multimedia resources (videos, websites, etc.) and were structured to follow the district-wide initiative of Culturally Responsive Instruction using Hammond’s Ready for Rigor (2014) “ignite, chunk, chew, and review” framework for lessons. Ignite involved sparking interest in the lesson, chunk entailed presenting content, chew involved an activity to process/discuss content shared, and review provided students an opportunity to reflect on the content.

Experiences with CES District-Wide

In 2022-2023, nearly 2,460 SPPS students enrolled in the semester-long CES course and nearly 30 teachers taught the course. About 70% of students who enrolled for the full semester successfully completed and earned full credit for the course. To understand students’ and teachers’ experiences with the CES course, we conducted district-wide surveys of students and teachers. In total, 744 students and 20 teachers responded to the surveys. Most student respondents (71%) had taken CES in the Spring 2023 semester and most teachers taught CES in both the Fall 2022 and the Spring 2023 semesters (see Figures 2 and 3).



Student Demographics

At least a couple of students from each school responded.¹ See Table 1 for the percentage of respondents who attended each school.

Table 1. High School Students Attended (N=588)

School	%
AGAPE	1%
Central	18%
Como Park	6%
Creative Arts	3%
Harding	13%
Highland Park	20%
Humboldt	5%
Johnson	7%
Open World Learning	5%
SPPS Online	6%
Washington Technology Magnet	16%

Students identified with a broad range of racial and ethnic categories, most commonly Asian American (37%) and white (38%; see Table 2). Additionally, as displayed in Table 3, students represented a broad range of gender identities.

Table 2. Student Race/Ethnicity (N=587)

Alaska Native	1%
African American/Black	18%
Asian American	37%
Latiné or Hispanic origin	11%
Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic	6%
Native American/Indigenous	4%
Pacific Islander	2%
SWANA (SouthWest Asian/North African)	2%
White	38%
Other (please specify)	7%

Note. These percentages add up to more than 100% because a portion of students selected more than 1 category).

Table 3. Student Gender (N=587)

Gender Non-Conforming	3%
Gender Fluid	2%
Non-Binary	4%
Transgender	2%
Female	51%
Male	41%
Other (please specify)	2%

Note. These percentages add up to more than 100% because a portion of students selected more than 1 category).

¹ Unfortunately, due to a survey development error, Gordon Parks High School was not included as an option for student survey respondents.

Teacher Demographics

Eight teachers identified as African American/Black, Asian American, or multiracial, including Native American/Indigenous. Five individuals chose not to respond to the question about race/ethnicity and the remaining seven identified as white. In terms of gender, nine teachers identified as male and six identified as female. The remaining five chose not to respond to the question about gender identity.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Both students and teachers were asked to report on their perceptions of culturally responsive practices in their CES classes. While most of these questions were similar across both groups of respondents, there were some differences to make the questions more relevant to student or teacher respondents. For example, students were asked if their teacher explained what they were learning through *multiple perspectives*, whereas teachers were asked if they explained what students were learning through *ethnic-studies based perspectives*.

Overall, there were many similarities in how students and teachers responded to these questions. More than 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their CES teacher explained what they were learning through multiple perspectives and more than 90% of teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they explained what they were learning through ethnic studies-based perspectives. Similarly, more than 90% of students and teachers agreed or strongly agreed that CES teachers created an environment where students' cultures were respected, treated all students as important members of the classroom, used real-life examples, and talked about/explored counter-narratives of oppressed groups. There was also widespread agreement among students and teachers (more than 80% agreed or strongly agreed) that CES teachers used examples from students' cultures when teaching, were interested in students' cultures, and helped students learn about their classmates' cultures. Interestingly, students more frequently agreed that CES teachers were interested in their classmates' cultures (93% agreed or strongly agreed) in comparison to their own culture (86% agreed or strongly agreed). Though only students were asked the following question, 89% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their CES teacher used examples that were interesting to help them learn (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Student Perception of Culturally Responsive Practices

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. My CES teacher explains what we are learning through multiple perspectives.	3%	6%	44%	48%
3. My CES teacher creates an environment where I feel my culture is respected.	2%	4%	36%	58%
4. My CES teacher creates an environment where we respect our classmates' cultures.	1%	1%	30%	67%
5. My CES teacher tries to communicate with my family about what I am learning.	6%	30%	49%	15%
6. My CES teacher treats my classmates and me as important members of the classroom.	2%	3%	36%	60%
7. My CES teacher uses real-life examples to help explain things.	1%	2%	34%	63%
8. My CES teacher uses examples from my culture when teaching.	4%	15%	49%	32%
9. My CES teacher is interested in my classmates' culture(s).	2%	6%	44%	49%
10. My CES teacher is interested in my own culture(s).	3%	11%	46%	40%
11. My CES teacher helps me learn about my classmates' cultures.	3%	9%	39%	49%

12. My CES teacher explores counter-narratives of oppressed groups with us.	1%	3%	43%	53%
13. My CES teacher uses examples that are interesting to help my classmates and me learn.	2%	9%	42%	47%

Table 5. Teacher-Reported Use of Culturally Responsive Practices

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. I explain what we are learning through ethnic studies-based perspectives.	0%	5%	60%	35%
3. I create an environment where students' cultures are respected.	0%	5%	25%	70%
4. I communicate with my students' families about what is learned throughout the course.	15%	15%	60%	10%
5. I communicate with my students' families in ways that are responsive to my students' culture(s) about what I am teaching.	17%	50%	17%	17%
6. I treat all students like they are important members of the classroom.	6%	0%	17%	78%
7. I use real-life examples to help explain things.	6%	0%	11%	83%
8. I use examples from my students' cultures when teaching.	6%	0%	44%	50%
9. I am interested in my students' cultures.	6%	0%	0%	94%
10. I help students learn about their classmates' cultures.	6%	6%	33%	56%
11. I have talked about counternarratives of oppressed groups.	6%	0%	44%	50%

Finally, in terms of communicating with families about what students were learning, responses were somewhat mixed. Only 64% of students agreed or strongly agreed that CES teachers tried to communicate with their families about what they were learning. Among CES teachers themselves, 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they communicated with their students' families about what was learned throughout the course. Yet, only 34% of CES teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they communicated with their students' families in ways that were responsive to their students' culture(s). When responding to an open-ended question about examples of how they communicated with students' families, CES teachers shared that they primarily sent emails with information about the course. Some teachers even sent emails on a weekly basis to both students and families. Most teachers also described sharing about the course during conferences with families. Other teachers shared that they posted materials on Schoology and spoke with families in person, over the phone, or when calling home due to absences. A few teachers described encouraging their students to talk with their families and attending the family forum. One teacher spoke about how communicating with families was an aspirational but not practical goal at this time. This teacher said:

To be honest I checked "agree," mostly because I post a syllabus and families have access to Schoology. But I think my situation may be a cautionary tale: [I teach multiple courses and therefore have multiple preps]. Additionally, the implementation of an 8/2 block schedule this year means teachers have one more class (and so 30+ more students) but the same amount of time. So while I would love to get in touch with families, unfortunately right now it functions as a sort of aspirational "nice to have."

This teacher continued by recommending the district consider ways to redesign school structures so that teachers have time to do this important work:

I believe that if district leadership is really committed to the radical work that CES embodies, this should include looking at ways that they can radically redesign what school is and how time is used in order to best support this work, and in so doing, teachers, students, and families. Barring that, at the very least, CES teachers should not have more than two preps.

CES Principles

CES teachers were asked to report on their modeling of the seven CES principles (see an overview under “CES Curriculum Overview”) in their CES course only, in their CES course and other courses they taught, and outside of class. Teachers could select as many of these responses as applied for each of the seven principles. See Table 6 with the full results for each principle. Interestingly, 55-70% of teachers reported modeling the principles in both CES and other course(s) they taught and 65-85% of teachers reported modeling the principles outside of class. The principles most commonly modeled in both CES and other courses taught were self-love and critical consciousness. In contrast, the most common principles modeled outside of class were honor and community.

Table 6. Teacher Report on the Spaces in Which They have Modeled the Seven Principles of CES (Select All That Apply)

	Self-Love	Honor	Community	Critical Consciousness	Resistance	Hope	Visualization
I haven't modeled this principle.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%
I have modeled this principle in CES course(s) only.	15%	15%	20%	15%	20%	20%	25%
I have modeled this principle in both CES and other course(s) I teach.	70%	55%	60%	70%	60%	55%	60%
I have modeled this principle outside of class.	75%	85%	80%	70%	75%	70%	65%

Teachers were then asked to select one principle and describe how they modeled that principle. The paragraphs below summarize teachers' responses:

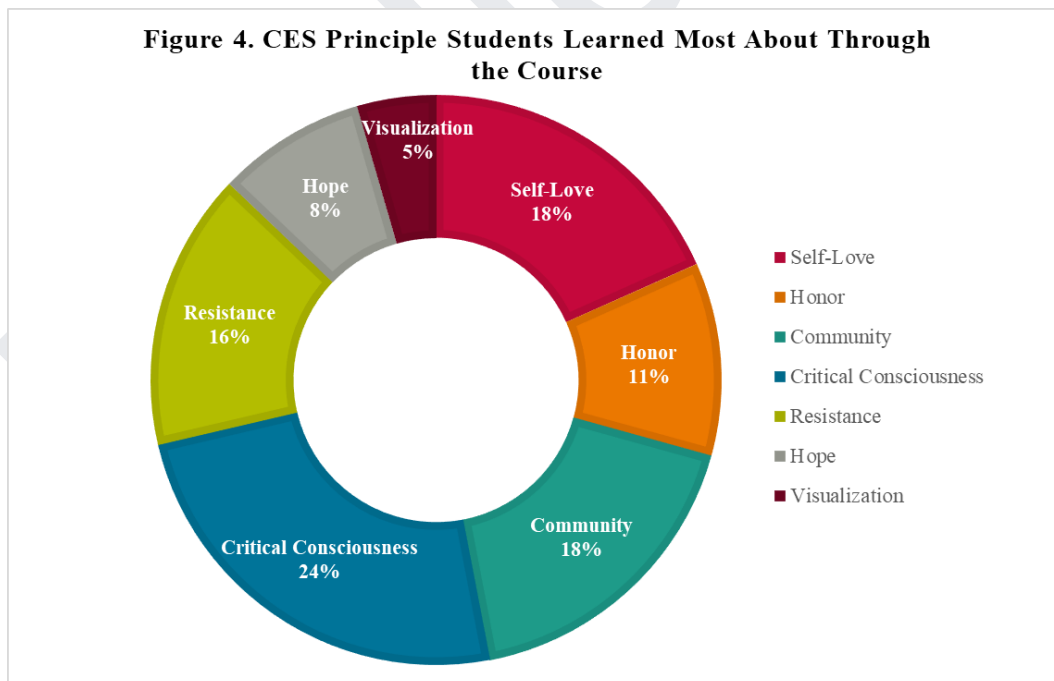
- (1) **Self-Love** - Teachers described modeling self-love by “talking out loud [about] the struggle for self-love and the reality of when [they] feel self love.” Additionally, teachers described coordinating activities. For example, one teacher coordinated a “journey through [B]lack dance and music” with a community leader. In addition to modeling self-love, this activity was an opportunity to honor women’s bodies and discuss “resistance through music and dance.”
- (2) **Honor** - An example of modeling honor was provided by a white teacher who felt it was important “to both acknowledge [their] positionality while honoring the stories and experiences of the diverse students [they] get to work with.” The teacher does this by talking with her class of students of color and immigrant students about “what a gift it is not only to [the teacher] but to all of [the students] to have that space together.”
- (3) **Community** - Multiple teachers shared examples of modeling community. These examples included taking time in class to talk about “what makes up their community,”

pointing out individual and collective academic successes, and engaging in social-emotional learning (SEL) activities “to help students take a break and pause” and community building activities to build a strong class culture. Additionally, one teacher shared: “I try to model community all the time through communication, food, joy, and laughter with other students, my colleagues, and other acquaintances.”

- (4) **Critical Consciousness** - In terms of modeling critical consciousness, teachers described “work[ing] hard to publicly ask deeper questions and challenge dominant narratives” and “pushing back on and encouraging students to question dominant narratives.” Teachers also modeled critical consciousness through “personal reflection and questioning,” and “thinking, and evaluating the concepts taught in class.”
- (5) **Resistance** - One teacher described modeling resistance by “work[ing] hard to participate in efforts to interrupt and resist systemic racism in education by attending rallies, meetings and doing work through my union.”
- (6) **Hope** - Finally, teachers modeled hope by relying on growth rather than fixed mindsets and “educating [their] students with the skills that they need to succeed in this society and by encouraging them to achieve their dreams.”

Visualization, the seventh principle of CES, was the only principle for which no teachers provided examples of modeling.

Students were asked to report on which principle they felt they learned the most about and then describe what they learned about that principle. The most commonly selected principle (24%) was critical consciousness. This was followed by community and self-love at 18% each, and resistance at 16%. A smaller percentage of students selected honor (11%), hope (8%), and visualization (5%; see Figure 4).



Students provided rich descriptions of what they learned about these principles. The paragraphs

below summarize what students shared they learned:

- (1) **Self-Love** - Students described self-love as accepting, being proud of, loving, and learning more about yourself. This includes “recognizing one’s worth and accepting one’s inherent value,” seeing your identities, caring for your body and mental health, learning about your community and representing your community, knowing about your ancestry/culture(s), putting yourself first, and appreciating yourself more. Students also described the importance of loving yourself so that you can then love others. Students described challenges with self-love, such as: “sometimes, I self-doubt about myself and forget how special I really am,” “I never think of myself[.] When I get myself in situations that will hurt I need to think of myself more like a human less of a car,” and “prior to tak[ing] this class I was ashamed to participate in my culture because I felt that I wasn’t really a part of it, my teacher encouraged me to take pride in my identity and look back on my families history and culture with love as they made me who I am.” Students learned about self love by:

learning how to appreciate my culture, race and ethnicity more and being more comfortable with my identity. I learned how to retaliate to the dominant narrative and create a counter narrative for people like me.

developing an understanding of who we are and where we come from, as this is crucial to our personal growth and self-acceptance. It is important to practice self-compassion, forgive ourselves for past mistakes, and focus on our strengths instead of our weaknesses. This means prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries to protect our mental and emotional health. When we love ourselves, we are better equipped to navigate life's challenges and obstacles while maintaining a positive perspective.

Additionally, one student described that “self-love was the most prominent principle learned. I’ve learned about my own culture which helped me reflect my identity.”

- (2) **Honor** - Students described honor as respect, communities coming together, recognizing different cultures and ethnic groups, feeling you can relate to someone or something, and feeling proud of your own and others’ ancestors, heritage, and culture. Additionally, students learned that honor is “a necessary part of acknowledging and making up for past and present oppression in the U.S and our community.” As such, many students talked about the importance of honoring “Indigenous, Black and communities of color [because they] have gone through a lot in [the] history of the United States.” Doing so includes feeling gratitude, recognizing communities’ struggles and resistance, learning the stories and past of your own and others’ communities, and giving voice to communities that have been silenced.
- (3) **Community** - With regards to community, students shared learning about both their own and others’ cultures and communities. This helped take “down some cultural barriers [...] and [see] how we can help each other.” As one student shared, “I have learned that community is very important because it lets all of us share our voice and make changes

that positively affect us.” Students saw community as present “anywhere whether it be in school or at home” or “our neighborhood, our friend groups.” In fact, students shared that their CES class was a good model of community in the way that “classmates really communicated with each other” and, as one student said, their “teacher makes us feel like we are all a big community sharing thoughts with each other and working together.” Many students emphasized the importance of community, the effects of systems of oppression on communities, and connections between community and race, ethnicity, and culture. Students “learned the meaning of community through studying local and indigenous communities (Rondo neighborhood and Landback), and working as a group to learn about and build community.”

- (4) **Critical Consciousness** - Students described critical consciousness as being aware, questioning, recognizing oppression and inequities in systems and seeking to change them, and not “just accepting information just as it is.” One student described this as “being more three dimensional in my vision” and another student described it as “see[ing] under all of the layers of politics, race and the system so that you have an in depth understanding of the world.” Taking it a step further, for one student, critical consciousness is tied to “empathy, how would I feel if this was how I was treated?” and another student connected critical consciousness to resistance saying, “I have learned that Critical Consciousness allows us to actively demonstrate resistance to the unequal systems of our society and give us a better understanding of the odds that are against us so that we can bring change to our communities.” Students described learning about critical consciousness by studying systemic oppression, the histories of oppressed communities, power, and how oppression shows up today. Through these activities students shared that they learned about how to apply critical consciousness in their everyday lives.
- (5) **Resistance** - When students shared what they learned about resistance, they described fighting for “what is right, good,” to “open up a freedom that has been wanted to change since a very long time,” “resisting power,” and creating change. Students learned about resistance through studying historical and recent resistance movements, such as “the California grape strike and boycott,” the “farmers strike and how they overcame bad working conditions through a strike,” “George Floyd protests, Stop Asian Hate protests, and the LGBTQ protests,” “The Bacon Rebellion, Jovita Idar’s printing press, and the protest for Ethnic Studies across schools,” the “standing rock protest,” and “the line 3 protest.” Additionally, there are multiple forms of resistance that students learned about, including voting, unions and protests, sit-ins, boycotts, spreading awareness, and civil disobedience. Finally, students described learning about resistance that has led to CES courses saying, for example, “I learned that people fight hard to have classes like Critical Ethics Studies in colleges and high schools. The third liberation world front was an inspiration to me! I learned that people of color got together to make a change in curriculum! Now we finally have CES.”
- (6) **Hope** - Students described hope as “when you keep going and trying and still having faith and believing” as well as “having loyalty to something or someone.” Many students shared that hope is a motivator, “hope keeps things going,” and “hope is the key to bring

happiness up even if you are going through trauma or something that is very stressful.” Students also learned about the role and importance of hope in resistance. For example, students learned that “during civil rights people had hope to be treated equally and have the same amount of respect, things, and voices to be heard.” Relatedly, students shared that “people always have hope to fight for what they believe is right,” “having hope will let you know that better days are coming,” and “hoping allows you to express love through the community around you.” Students also learned to “have hope because [they are] the next generation” and that to have hope, they need to “release the pain and the bad memories” and “let go [of] everything that [is] holding me back.” Finally, students expressed hope that one day “the world will be at peace,” “uneducated people will finally start understanding how to treat people equal no matter what,” and “things will get better from here and the future holds improvement instead of bad things.”

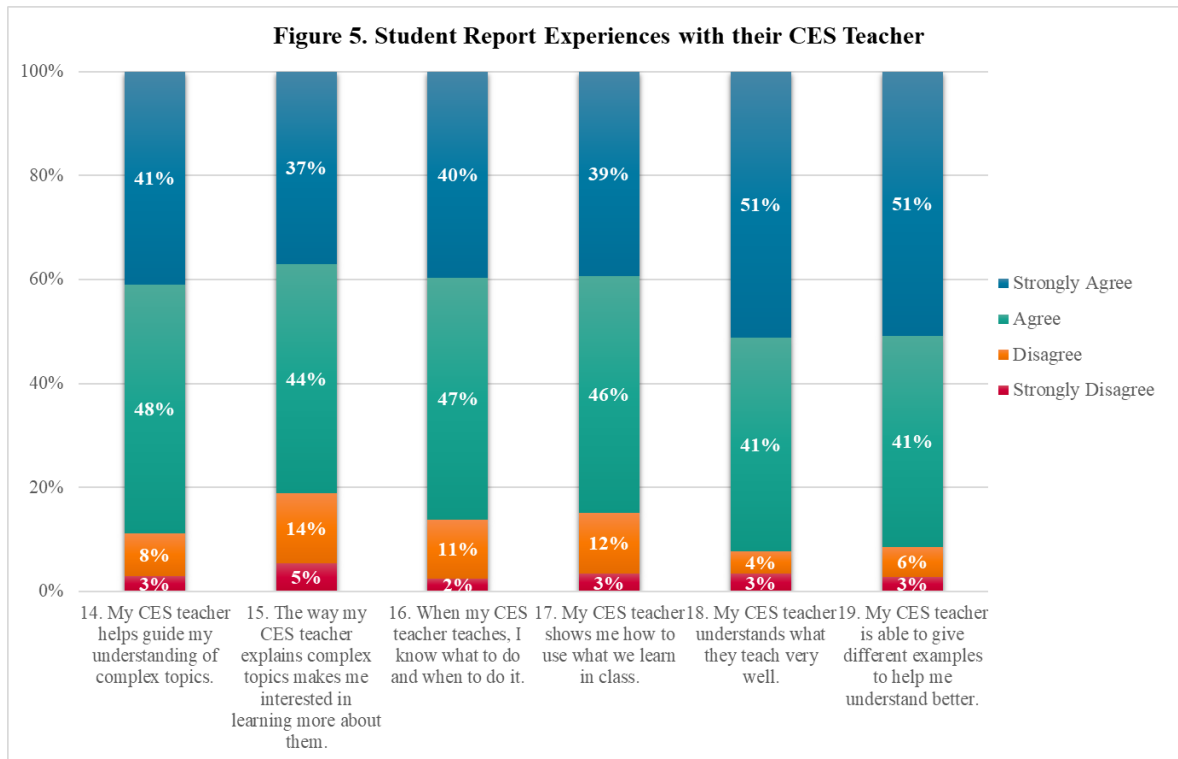
- (7) **Visualization** - Visualization, as students shared, is all about “envisioning a better future” and identifying how “to make those possibilities possible and achievable.” Related to visualization, students described learning “how to present your voice.” Additionally, course discussions gave students new insights on what the future could look like. One student described this saying:

After taking this course and hearing everyone else’s experiences it gave me a new insight on the future possibilities for the future. The fact that everyone agrees that oppression is outdated and we all deserve to treat each other with kindness and understanding. We can change the societal ideology to one that promotes self love, kindness and hope. We could lift these social constructions we have on each other. The judgements and the discrimination but it all starts with visualization.

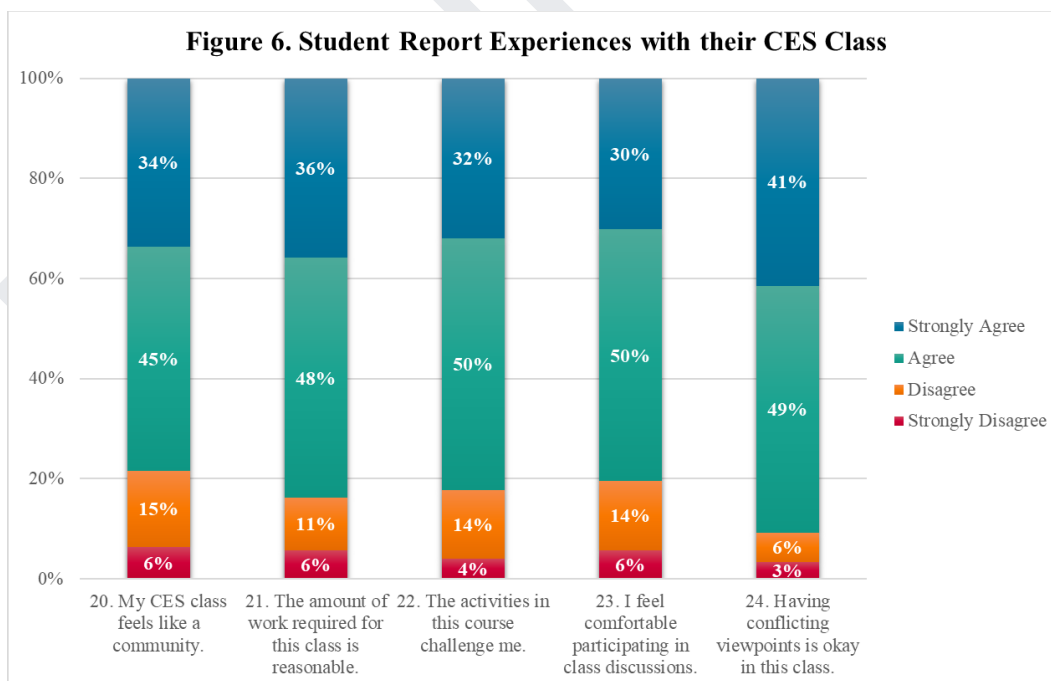
Experiences with CES

Both students and teachers were asked to report on their experiences with the CES course. Specifically, students were asked about various experiences with their CES teacher, classroom community, coursework, activities, and class discussions. Teachers were asked to report on their preparedness to teach CES, support they received, and class discussions in which conflicting viewpoints arose. In the paragraphs below, we provide insights from students’ and teachers’ responses to these questions.

Student experiences. Students overwhelmingly agreed (more than 90% agreed or strongly agreed) that their CES teachers understood what they were teaching very well and were able to give different examples to help them understand better. Similarly, most students agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher helped guide their understanding of complex topics (89%), they knew what to do for the course and when to do it (87%), their teacher showed them how to use what they learned in class (85%), and the way their teacher explained complex topics made them interested in learning more (81%; see Figure 5).

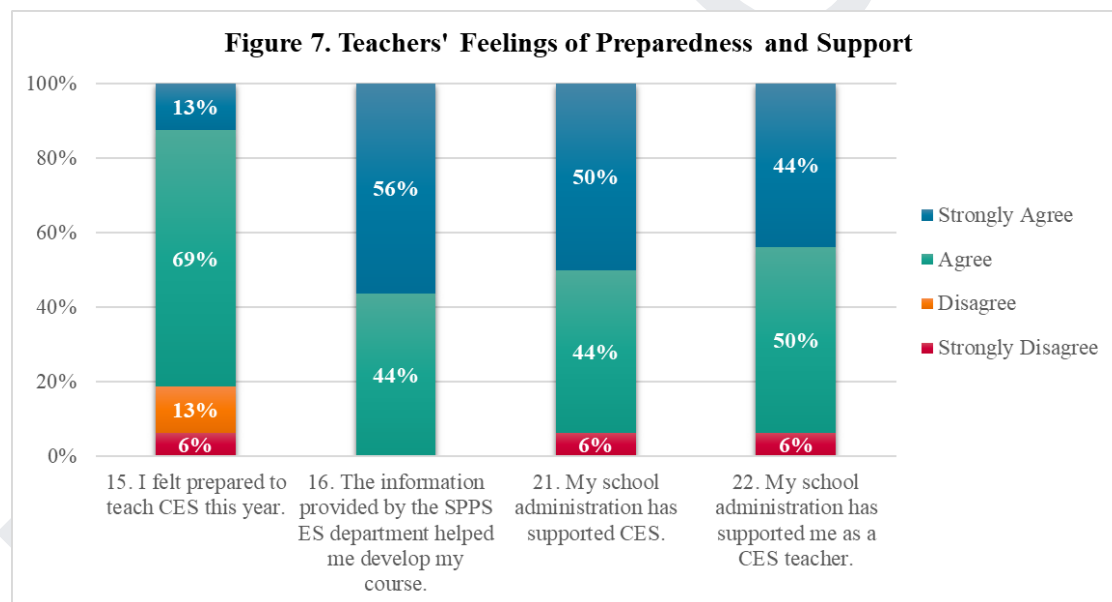


Additionally, 89% of students agreed or strongly agreed that having conflicting viewpoints was okay in class. Most students also felt that the amount of work for the class was reasonable (84% agreed or strongly agreed), the activities challenged them (82% agreed or strongly agreed), and they felt comfortable participating in class discussions (80% agreed or strongly agreed). Lastly, roughly 79% of students reported that their CES class felt like a community (see Figure 6).



We asked a few additional questions about conflicting viewpoints raised in class. About 60% of students reported that there had been classroom discussions in which conflicting viewpoints were shared. Among these students who reported conflicting viewpoints were shared, 88% reported that their teacher helped them learn *some* or *a lot* from discussions where conflicting viewpoints were shared. Students were then asked to share what they learned from discussions where conflicting viewpoints were shared. Among the most common responses were that people have different perspectives, it is important to respect others' perspectives, and that by talking about conflicting viewpoints, students "can learn from each other," "look at things with a different perspective," and gain "a more comprehensive understanding of the topic as a whole." Conversations with conflicting viewpoints also challenged students to learn "how to listen to others" and consider how they might "disagree with others, but still stay friends." At times though, conflicting viewpoints were challenging for students and some students still felt like their perspectives were the "right" perspectives. Similarly, as one student put it "all opinions are welcomed but some just need [their] eyes open[ed] to the white power or racism."

Teacher experiences. While only 82% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they felt prepared to teach CES this year, all teachers (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided by the SPPS ES Department helped them develop their course. Additionally, 94% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their school administration supported CES and supported them as a teacher (see Figure 7).



Teachers were then asked to respond to an open-ended question about what would help them feel more prepared to teach CES. One teacher said it would have been easier if they "had been teaching [CES] at the beginning of the year" and another teacher said "there was no way to feel very prepared for a brand new class that hadn't been taught in that format before." Recommendations to prepare teachers for CES included providing more time at the beginning of the year to "really look at the curriculum that was created" and "find[ing] teachers with a degree to teach CES."

Teachers were also asked to provide examples of support from school administration. Teachers shared that school administration has “help[ed] find the best teachers to teach the course,” “paired [them] with a teacher who has a better fundamental understanding of the course,” and checked in regularly, including “ask[ing] how things are going, observ[ing], and discuss[ing] student success.” Furthermore, school administrators supported teachers in “taking students on field trips,” providing “a small fund to use,” “purchas[ing] additional class materials when needed,” providing “a sub for a day so that [they] could train [their] CES TAs,” and providing “bussing [...] to the Capitol [for the] Ethnic Studies Day rally.” One principal also let a teacher leave “staff meetings earlier to attend cohort meetings on Thursday” and another provided “support with resources and emotional support for the struggles and pushback from majority staff that were against the course’s curriculum.” Only 1 teacher commented that their administration was unsupportive.

To better understand teachers’ experiences, we also asked about challenges and successes when teaching CES this year. In terms of challenges, multiple teachers shared that a lack of time, difficulty engaging students, a lack of student maturity, and limited accessibility of the content for students learning English made teaching CES difficult. For example, teachers shared that teaching CES required a lot of planning to respond to “the needs of the group” and a lot of time to grade assignments (especially the summative work). As one teacher said, this was especially true because “the scope and sequence we received moves very quickly, with a LOT of assignments for students to complete. This makes it hard to go as deep into some issues as I would prefer.” Engaging students in the course was difficult because students saw “it as just another required credit,” “my student population [is] quiet and don’t regularly feel empowered historically to speak up in class,” and “when it’s coming from a white educator, students don’t always think it’s genuine. I need to work on decentering myself as the ‘teacher’ and pull in & lift up other voices instead.” Another teacher voiced challenges with engaging white students in particular, saying:

Getting students, especially white students, to speak up. White students acknowledge they are "unknowing" but are afraid to be called racist. They also struggle with their lack of ethnicity and don't feel the same solidarity because they lack ethnicity.

A few teachers also said that 9th and 10th graders struggled to have the maturity level to handle the content of the course. Instead, they believed that the course would better align with the maturity level of 11th and 12th graders. As one teacher said,

I believe 10th grade students are not ready for this conversation. They just got comfortable in high school and have not understand the dynamics of their identities. This would be a great class for 11th graders. There is no support from Admin. Most people don't know what's going on in our classroom. Students don't know why they are there.

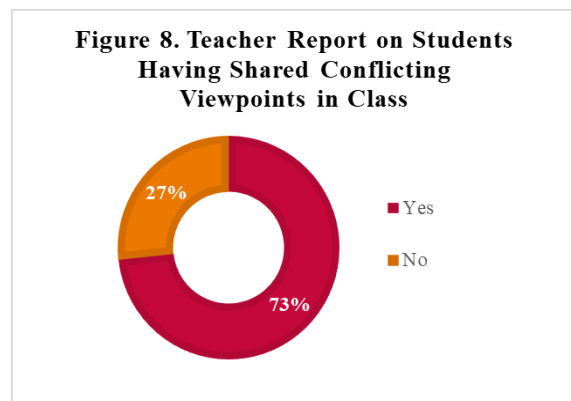
Speaking to the accessibility of the CES content, teachers shared, “At times, the language of the content is above the English language levels of the students” and “The most challenging thing has been figuring out how to provide academic and language support to English language learners who have to deal with both the language barriers and the rigor of concepts covered in the CES [course].”

Additional challenges included teachers feeling confident in what they are teaching (e.g., “it is new and I am still learning the best way to work through the course”) and facing pushback from colleagues (“push back came through explicit and implicit actions committed by teachers at my school”).

In terms of successes, several teachers shared successes in students learning and engaging in the class. This included students “taking pride in themselves,” “open[ing] up in a classroom about their specific identities,” “change their opinion and find value in what they are learning,” and “Seeing students be honest and open with me about what they think/ have experienced. Hearing students recommend the class to others.” Additionally, it included “more student participation,” “interest in learning more about themselves and the people around them,” “profound conversations and action projects,” and “seeing students deeply engaged in CES when they aren’t engaged in other classes.” Multiple teachers also shared successes in building relationships, such as students “interact[ing] with other students who they previously did not know,” “appreciat[ing] the class conversation,” “buil[ding] a positive community in my classroom and students are really excited to attend class,” “getting to know my students on a different level,” and “knowing from student feedback that they felt heard, seen, and safe.” Lastly, teachers experienced successes with students holding “conversations with people in their households,” teachers themselves “planting the seeds for Critical Ethnic Studies for future classes and confronting the challenges created by fellow teachers,” and teachers themselves learning from their students.

In addition to these successes teachers reported, teachers *felt* successful when seeing students’ capstone projects, smiles and excitement for class, as well as growth and voices. As one teacher shared, “Seeing the diverse students grow and find their voice and develop an appreciation for themselves, their cultures, family, and communities” made them feel successful. Teachers also felt successful when students learned, shared they liked the course, and understood the essential questions. Importantly, “the support from the Ethnic Studies Cohort,” “lessons and resources,” having “1 prep,” being given “permission to deviate from the scope and sequence,” and “a co-teacher who has taught the class before” also helped teachers feel successful. Finally, one teacher shared that they are still “working to feel successful - [they] don’t believe [they] are there yet.”

In terms of conflicting viewpoints, 73% of CES teachers reported that yes, students had shared conflicting viewpoints in class (see Figure 8). Teachers were then asked to describe how they helped students learn from discussions where conflicting viewpoints were shared. In these instances, teachers described teaching concepts like “expect and accept non-closure,” “assume positive intent,” “courageous conversations,” “apologies,” “intent vs. impact,” and that “two things can be true at once.” When conflicting viewpoints arose in conversation, teachers also talked “openly in class about when conflict feels good or bad and why” as well as “emphasized



that people have different perspectives and that even though we may disagree with them we can respect each other.” Two teachers described asking follow-up questions and/or pushing back, saying:

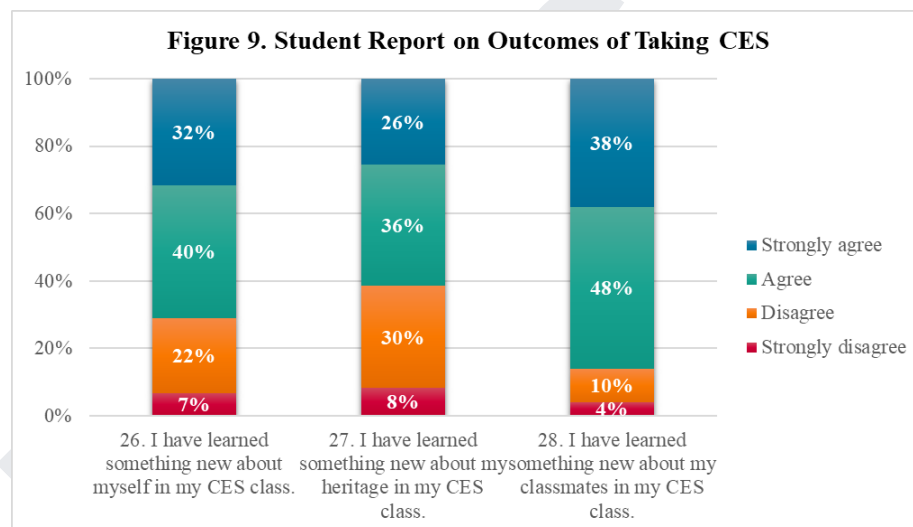
I usually ask a follow up question about what they said to see where their thinking and processing is going, and then we talk about if that viewpoint is problematic or not and why.

I push back a little bit and offer a different perspective if another student hasn't already done so. They are always willing to listen and accept different opinions/ experiences.

Outcomes

The final set of questions students and teachers were asked to respond to concerned outcomes of taking and teaching the CES course. Students reported on their own learning and teachers reported on their students’ learning as well as their own intentions to teach CES during the next school year.

Students most frequently agreed that they learned something new about their classmates in their CES class (86% agreed or strongly agreed). Additionally, 72% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something new about themselves in their CES class and just 62% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something new about their heritage in their CES class (see Figure 9).



Students were also asked to respond to an open-ended question about what actions (if any) participating in CES has inspired them to take. Actions students shared included self-love, going to therapy, connecting to their community more, advocating for themselves, thinking more critically, taking more responsibility to make change, being more open minded, talking with their families and friends, taking more ethnic and gender studies classes, sharing their capstone projects, and learning more about social justice, history, oppressed communities, counternarratives, and their own heritage. Furthermore, students shared actions that were related to their school, such as making change at their school, organizing school cultural events, and

joining the CES Showcase Committee. Students also shared actions including getting involved in passing Minnesota's recent ethnic studies bill, resisting oppression, donating to charities, using their voice and speaking up more, and participating in walkouts and protests. A couple of students voiced feeling scared to take action and or saying "it is hard to [take action] because of my severe social anxiety." Some students did share that the class did not inspire them to take any action.

The final question students were asked was to share anything they would like to change about the course. Many students said there was nothing they would change about the course. Some students said they would like to see the course have more content about more marginalized groups (e.g., "learn more about Latino heritage," "talk more about the Karen people," and "that Indigenous people were talked about for 5 days and Asians only in passing.") and even go beyond the United States to talk about "discrimination in other parts of the globe." More in-depth conversations and discussions with more participation among classmates was also requested by students. For some, it seemed to be the same few students discussing each time. One specific suggestion was to "do fun things in the first couple days of class so we can warm up to each other rather than doing bonding stuff later in the semester." Another suggestion was to "make some of the questions asked have a separate prompt if you are not part of a minority." Several students also commented on the need for qualified teachers and teachers who were Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. For example, one student wrote,

Hire more educated people for the job. The amount of personalized self belief and stubbornness to oneself false education and internalized racism against the world is terrible. The teacher I currently have does not respect or look out for other cultures. Yes, we all share oppression but it does not use the right of [them] speaking up for other people of color besides the one [they are] a part of. It's disrespectful and invasive because most of [their] opinions are falsely configured and out of date.

Another student wrote:

Why would a course about being critical have white teachers? My school has one [B]lack teacher teaching it. How can we be critical if we don't listen to the voices who are firstly impacted? Also white teachers even if they mean well will implement their own biases that students will have to deal with.

This student continued pointing out how Black, Indigenous, and students of Color should not be tokenized in the class:

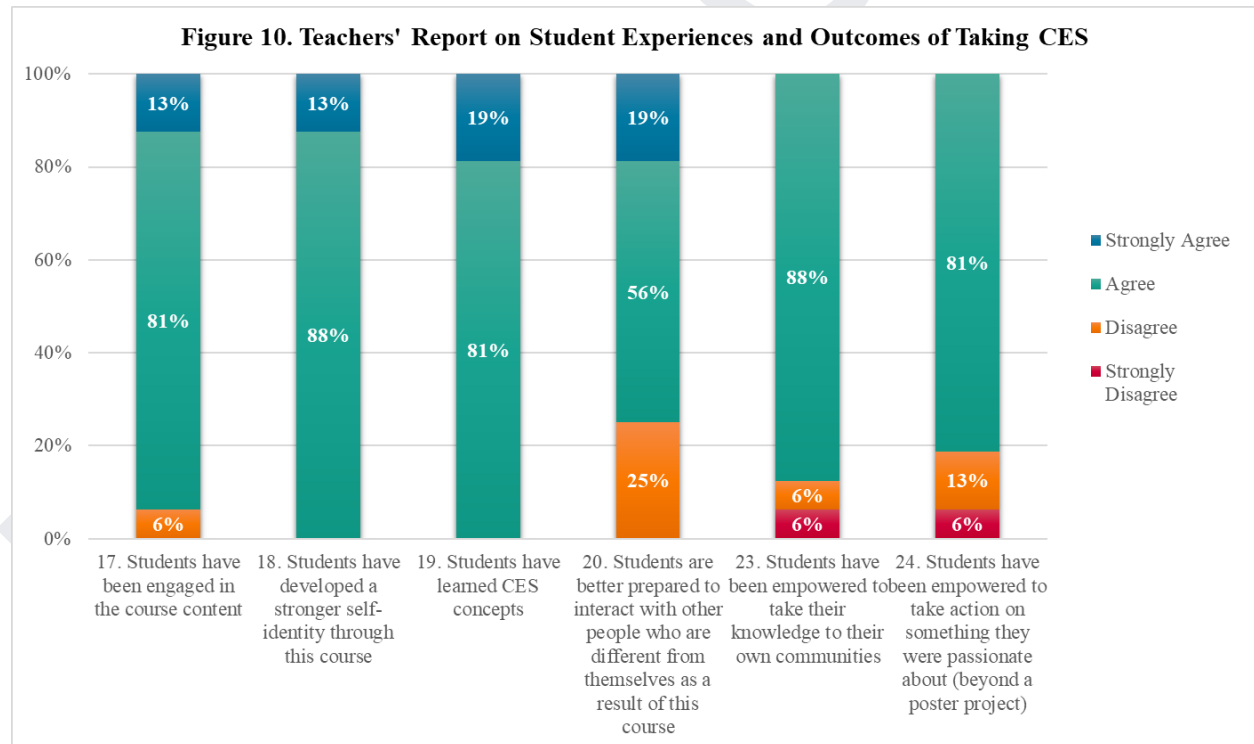
Also don't make [B]lack kids speak about personal stuff if they don't want to. This class shouldn't tokenize the BIPOC students for class discussions.

In terms of activities and assignments, students wanted more fun, hands-on activities (rather than text analysis), less busy work, fewer summative assignments, and less repetitive assignments. Students would have liked a project focused on researching family background and history. Furthermore, students recommended including more lessons about history, LGBTQ+ topics, guest speakers, more in-person interactions with community members, field trips, and more

action-focused teaching. One student also recommended that the course be made “less triggering [by taking] away or minimiz[ing] depictions of abortion, rape, and lynching.” Overall, as these comments indicate, it would have been beneficial to have more student voice in the selection of course content.

Finally, while some students suggested the course not be required, others suggested it be a year-long course because there is simply too much content to cover in one semester. Students would have liked to “take our time on each topic” and study a “wider variety of modern and historical topics.” Furthermore, one student recommended that CES was taught earlier saying, “I wish we took it earlier, when we were younger. This course is so important for little kids to learn of early.”

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed (100% agreed or strongly agreed) that students developed a stronger sense of self-identity through the CES course and learned CES concepts. Most teachers also felt that students were engaged in the course content (94% agreed or strongly agreed). Additionally, teachers primarily agreed that students were empowered to take their knowledge to their own communities (88% agreed) and to take action on something they were passionate about (beyond a poster project; 81% agreed). Finally, 75% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students were better prepared to interact with people who are different from themselves as a result of the CES course (see Figure 10).



In terms of how students have developed a stronger self-identity through this course, teachers shared that students are able to better verbalize their experiences, perspectives, and identities. For example, teachers said:

I think many students were able to really explain themselves in many ways. They used different types of identifiers to report back to the group or in their journal. To me, CES course was a strong space for the students who is a part of the LGBTIQ+ community

I think many of my students have gotten more comfortable with their identity and who they are through the conversations and activities that we have done during the identity, origins and narratives unit. That unit yields the best written and deeply thoughtful journals of the class.

My sense is that for many students; they rarely have had the chance to express their racial, gender, or sexual orientation identity. The opportunity to feel validated about who they are and empowered to be proud of who they are was present in their participation in the class and the written work. I believe student[s] appreciated the process of understanding more about their identity and their relationship to society.

I believe that students in my course have been able to explore and express themselves in an authentic way, particularly as we delve more deeply in the course content.

Just by analyzing student assignments and reflections it has been fun to see how they have started to critically think about themselves, their identities, and others. They have had much deeper reflections and thoughts about society and life in general through this exploration.

Teachers felt students also developed a stronger self-identity by “connect[ing] more deeply with family and cultural institutions by opening conversations about culture and heritage with those people and places.” Finally, students developed a stronger self-identity by “realiz[ing] that THEY are important and that THEY have a voice in what matters to them. Even the white students have begun to use their voices.” Journals and capstone projects were particularly helpful as students developed and explored their self-identity.

We also asked teachers about examples of how students have been empowered to take their knowledge to their own communities. Examples, included students “discuss[ing] what they are learning with family and friends,” “interview[ing] family members to learn more about their family’s history,” “helping in the halls, helping stop fights and even speaking out when they see microaggressions,” “mak[ing] a documentary and then shar[ing] [it] with their affinity group outside of school,” and bringing “students to the Capitol to interact with other community members and lawmakers.” A few teachers shared that they are still working on this with students.

Teachers were also asked to share an example of how students have been empowered to take action on something they were passionate about (beyond a poster project). Teachers again shared that students interviewed family members. Additionally, teachers shared that students “feel compelled to organize events in their schools,” “applied to join [the] youth capstone showcase planning committee,” “identified their state representatives and wrote to them about why ethnic studies should be taught all across Minnesota,” and did an action/awareness piece for their capstone projects that included interacting with staff, peers, or community members. A few

teachers shared more detailed approaches, including:

Students have done a number of excellent action projects, including hosting a forum on teacher hiring and teacher diversity at Creative Arts and St. Paul, attended by the principal and by district representatives. Students created two public art galleries at Creative Arts, and other students worked to organize and revamp a clothing bank for students who couldn't access clothing that fit their bodies or gender identities.

Many of my students for their capstone were required to do an action/awareness piece. I have one student that is about to present about his culture to staff in the building for PD. There was a group of students who are working on an issue with food in the cafeteria. I have another group of students that are connecting with Hmong club to raise awareness about cultural issues in their community.

I begin class with something called "CES in the News" where I invite students to share things that resonate with our course that have appeared in their news feeds or similar. To be sure, I wish more students would participate in this, but I always model it by bringing a few items of my own. One student who reliably participated has twice pointed us to MNTeenActivists and actions they were planning.

Finally, a few teachers described that they are still working on action with their students.

To add to these insights about student development and empowerment, we also asked teachers to share activities that they felt went well and why it went well. Some examples teachers shared were focused on helping students use their voices and manage social anxiety, such as:

I do an adapted "We're not really strangers" throughout the class meeting. I use it as a pop-up sort of check-in that give students a chance to use prompts to start conversations with others that they would not normally talk with. This gives them a feeling of being in a safe space as well as using their voice.

Walking conversations - students are still working to recover from Covid in my opinion, especially in terms of social anxiety. Walking conversations allow them to do this in a low key manner as opposed to high stakes.

I think an activity that went well in my first semester is the capstone project. It really challenged students to overcome some of the social obstacles they had. Many were proud of their work and was willing to share it out loud in front of the class.

Other activities focused on discussions of identity and culture, such as:

When discussing culture, we had a conversation about how different cultures view the concept of time. Each student got to reflect on how their own family views time and on how that compares to the view of time at school.

I thought the identity unit went well. Students were super interested and ready to learn

about themselves and others. I also changed up how students could earn credit - they could either participate in class for credit or complete the assignment and I had way more participation.

The social identity wheel activity and assignment usually goes well with students because I am modeling it for them by using myself as an example and then having them apply it to themselves.

The activity that went really well for my class was the lessons from Unit 1. Students enjoyed exploring and discussing their cultures and [...] which identities they think about the most. I managed to [...] conclude that unit with an academic essay, which I think helped scholars practice their writing skills. They were also very proud to show off the artistic part of the lessons and we created a wall outside of our classroom to display for all to see what we're learning in the class.

We had an activity where I had ten aspects of identity posted on the walls around the room, and had students get up and arrange themselves around the ones they most identified with, the ones they least identified with, and the ones they wanted to know more about. At each point in the activity I paused and asked for volunteers to explain why they ended up where they did and what they were thinking. It was really meaningful in that they led the learning.

Finally, some activities tackled topics such as over- and under-representation, social movements, gender and sexual orientation, and beliefs (e.g., belief in a meritocracy):

We did a large interdisciplinary demographics project, in which students look at over- and underrepresentation in areas of their choosing (teacher demographics, arrests, graduation rates, homeownership, etc) and then use that as an entry point to research if and how systems reproduce this inequality. Students then presented. This was a great final project for our work on systems and a good segway into final action projects.

An activity that I think went well was an Intro to Social Movements lesson. We discussed forms of social movements & forms of resistance and students were energized by that discussion and passionate about the topic. We looked at historical and modern examples and analyzed their methods, purpose, and effectiveness.

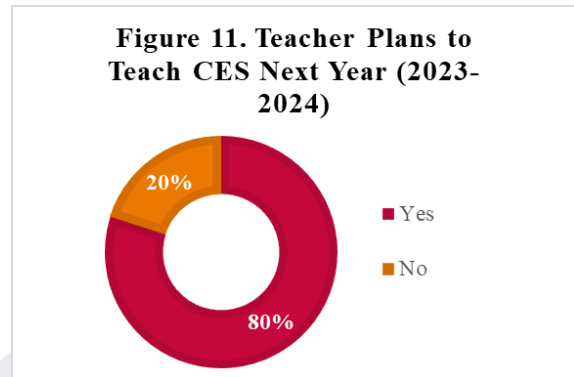
I taught a lesson on gender and sexual orientation. My students were aware of many terms associated with LGBTQ+, but the lesson offered clarity. I believe this lesson also help[ed] many students feel they are validated in the class.

One activity we had was showing students two contrasting statements such as "Everyone who works hard can become rich" vs. "It does not matter how much a person tries, only certain people become wealthy." Students are then invited to express why they identify with one statement over the other. It was interesting to see that most students stand on the side that claims "Everyone who works hard can become rich" but when being asked to elaborate, they mention how some people are rich because they inherited money from

their families.

In terms of teaching CES again, 80% of teachers reported that they plan to teach CES again next year (see Figure 11). Reasons teachers planned to not teach CES again included feeling they “don’t have the knowledge and preparation to lead this course,” “taking a year-long parental leave,” and “relocating to [another state] next year.”

Finally, teachers were asked if they could change something about the course, what would they change? Teachers primarily focused on curricular-related changes, such as differentiation and adaptations for students learning English and students with below grade-level reading skills. One teacher would like to see an accelerated version of the course. Multiple teachers shared that they would like more time to teach all of the units and some suggested making CES a year-long course. Teachers would also have “11th graders instead of 10th graders” and “less or more efficient grading.” Furthermore, there are various adjustments to the course that teachers would make, such as “allow[ing] students more opportunity to learn more about their origin and history of making [the] U.S. their home,” having “more opportunities for students from different schools to interact,” and “invit[ing] more guest speakers, includ[ing] families in the learning process with intention, bring[ing] the students out into the community, hav[ing] students lead the class & creat[ing] lines of questioning.”



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Student Capstones

On June 10, 2023, the SPPS ES Department hosted a Student Showcase. The event featured speakers, art and expressive activities, a meal, and multiple formats in which students were invited to present their CES capstone projects. It is important to note that the information in this section represents only the student work that was presented during the Student Showcase and not an analysis of all student capstone projects. The evaluation team observed workshop sessions and the capstone visual displays to gather evidence of students’ engagement in the coursework, the actions the students took to complete the projects, and the student outcomes from the capstone.

Students were offered the opportunity to present their capstone projects in a visual display or make an oral presentation during workshops. Some students shared poetry or spoken word, one group demonstrated a traditional Karen dance, while other students spoke on their capstone topics. The types of projects presented included topics such as school and community safety, explorations of cultural heritage and identity, race, gender, sexual orientation, intersectionality, environmental justice, and projects that delved into school or public policies.

Capstone projects were a CES course requirement. The projects were completed by individuals or small groups of students. The process of developing the project was mapped onto the visual displays and included: background information about the topic, the problem or issue(s) addressed, the CES principles and themes the guided the students’ research, the connections students made between students, families and broader community, research and data gathering,

suggested solutions based on results, and student reflections of the capstone process. The reflections asked students to respond to prompts including what surprised them while they were working on the project, what challenges they encountered, what they learned, what they are proud of, and how they might address the issue based on what they learned.

Students designed the research project including survey or interview instruments. They gathered data, conducted the analysis, and reported their findings. The capstone projects included citations of sources the students had reviewed to support the capstone process.

Student Showcase Capstone Presentation Titles

Cultural Heritage & Identity

Pwo Karen Language
Connecting to Cultural Roots
Students Feel Disconnected to their
Cultural Identity
CES Culture Fest
Kuv Tus Tub: a Paj Ntaub
Hmong Traditions/Superstitions and
their Meaning
Connecting to and Acknowledging Our
Hmong Culture
Hmong Funeral
Hmong Wedding Politics: The Bride
Price
Self-Love and Identity at [SPPS] High
School

Environmental Justice

Climate Justice
Ways to Reduce Pollution
How Does Climate Change Affect
Communities of Color?
The Effects of Climate Change in Our
Communities

Gender

Gender Norms
Gender Norm/Roles
Gender Gap Pay
Gender Inequality: Resistance &
Oppression
Roe v. Wade

Women's Rights Movements
Self-Love and Self-Motivation
Techniques for Agape Girls
Women's Health Matters!

Intersectionality

Perceptions Surrounding Multi-Layer
Identities
Female Oppression in Hmong Culture
Two Dominant Narratives about Young
Black Women
Missing and Murdered
Missing and Murdered Indigenous
Women
Affirmation Mirrors
Identity and Microaggression Daily
connect Lessons
The Taliban Oppression of Afghan
Women and Hazara Populations

Race

Asian Hate Crimes
Land Back
Solidarity: Black & Asian Students
Abolitionism
Hispanic Men's Gender Norms/
Stereotypes

School & Community Safety

School Safety
Security in Schools
Gun Violence in the U.S.

The Link Between Lack of Funding and
Violence in Low-Income Schools
Student Violence at [SPPS] High School
Guns and Violence at [SPPS] High
School

Sexual Orientation

LGBTQ+ Acceptance
Issues in Prison Systems: Support for
Trans People who are Incarcerated
On Transgender Inequality, How Dead
Names Affect People
Heterosexism in the Philippines

School or Public Policy

[SPPS] Elementary

Student Showcase Capstone Descriptions

In both the capstone displays and the presentations, students articulated what their capstones meant to them as well as what they learned about the topic and about themselves. The following quotes are examples documented from the capstone projects:

Through the course of this class, I have learned to be considerate and conscious of my words and actions. I've learned how I fit into all the different systems of our society as well as how I can help improve systems to benefit all. I have a more in-depth awareness of the history of events and consequences, how various groups have rebelled, and how some of them have won. Systems are ingrained into everything we are and do. They shape our thoughts and actions; it is important to be critically conscious. (Perceptions Surrounding Multi-Layer Identities Capstone)

I'm proud that I was able to research and get information from peers to make a piece that can help promote, help influence, help convince people to act upon this issue instead of putting it on social media thinking that something magically will happen. Nothing will improve and solve itself unless you, unless we all do something about it. (Asian Hate Crimes Capstone)

When schools don't have the resources necessary for a safe environment, it can make it harder for students to be cared for and valued. I believe that a lot of students have given up because they aren't properly being encourage[d]. However, if we focus on the principle of self-love and valuing ourselves and our communities, I believe we can work towards a goal where students are able to get the resources they need to succeed in high school and beyond. It's important to raise awareness on the ongoing funding gap that is present in schools across America. (The Link Between Lack of Funding and Violence in Low-Income Schools Capstone)

Police Brutality
[SPPS School]'s Bathroom Policy
[SPPS] High School Bathroom System
School Schedule: Proposal to Change to
a Four-Day School Week
[SPPS School]'s Tardy Policy
Concerning the State of [SPPS]'s
Classes
Vape
Oppression and Struggles of
Employment
The H-2A Program: Agricultural
Workers
Food Apartheid
Karen Teens Using Drug

This narrative has the power because it is something that still goes on every day, in our public schools, to young [B]lack women. The way that it continues to happen makes it very hard for [B]lack women to get a secondary education. It makes them have to work 3x harder than any other non-minority in school. (Two Dominant Narratives about Young Black Women Capstone)

I learned a lot of new informations (sic) researching about the abolitionist movement. Before I started doing this project I also didn't know anything about abolitionism but now I know almost every important thing about it. (Abolitionism Capstone)

As an Asian immigrant myself I felt like a lot of Asian American are more likely to not knowing a lot about their ancestors roots and background... We learned that once we become aware of a topic like this our mindset starts to widen up... Our action is to create a slideshow about students who feel disconnected from their culture identity. By doing this we can spread awareness on the students who feel this way and show that they're not alone. We want to address the issue and give awareness that you don't need to disregard yourself because of it. (Students Feel Disconnected to their Cultural Identity Capstone)

Ethnic Studies is Aunt Peggy's mac and cheese, tastes like culture, smells like community, I feel visible... Ethnic Studies feels like hope, like the dirt burying us is swept aside to reveal this treasure trove, one that tells us who we came from – realizing the connections and legacy across generations. For me, at its core, it is reclaiming my humanity, the humanity of others... Ethnic Studies is the sound, the ripple that keeps my ancestors alive and present for me and my descendants. (Capstone Poem)

Though I had a general idea of the topic because of some of my peers identifying as transgender, I was still learning and still have lots more to learn. Therefore, hearing the options straight from a partner who identifies as transgender helped correct a lot of the mistakes I had made or assumptions I had... The proudest moment or happiest I felt during this project was when we sent out a google form and sent it to all different kinds of people, who all had various views and even opposing views from one another. I loved reading the responses to the form as it gave me so much insight and perfect and perfectly supports the project topic... Working on this project specifically sparked a passion I had long ago and it's to bring awareness and justice to those who feel misheard, misunderstood, or not even listened to at all. (On Transgender Inequality, How Dead Names Affect People Capstone)

Throughout the process of researching we found that the reasons for why there could be a disconnect in cultural roots is due to the fact that... there isn't enough intergenerational connects with each generation... Overall the project taught us that talking and relearning our history would help us feel how past generations have felt. It should make us proud to be Hmong and be proud to be ourselves. (Connecting to & Acknowledging Our Hmong Culture Capstone)

Students were encouraged to develop solutions that emerged from their research. A few examples from the capstone projects included encouraging police training to include learning

about body language, creating a club for BIPOC students to come together, suggestions for [SPPS] High School's bathroom policy, giving kids the pathway to quit vaping, and using tools they learned from the CES course to affect systemic change.

My solution [is to] train [police] to read body language better...When becoming a police officer, you should take a 2-3 month course to learn how to [read] body language better. (Police Brutality Capstone)

At [SPPS] High School, I want to create a club for [People of Color] POC students to come together in solidarity and learn about each other. I believe that creating a comfortable place for students, the people of our future, to come and discuss how to fight for justice with/for each other will help. Starting from learning more about each other as well as respecting them, to coming together in solidarity will create a strong force that can change the future. (Solidarity: Black & Asian Students Capstone)

We think instead of one bathroom pass in every classroom, there should be two bathroom passes in every classroom. With the time limit of 15 minutes or less. Since our issue happens to be in school, we believe addressing the problem [with] the principal or security will allow us to talk about ways to change and improve the school's security and the student and staff privacy. We will make an appointment with the principal. ([SPPS High School]'s Bathroom Policy Capstone)

Invite [students who vape] to a community where they can forget about vape and do things that can help them with life...Open doors for kids who are lost and need guidance, heavily there are kids who are willing to change but don't know how. (Vape Capstone)

While taking CES course I have grown to better understand the systems that form our society. By gaining a better understanding of the systems that surround us I have also gained the tools to question how and why the systems are working the way they are. (H-2A Program Capstone)

Case Studies

The case studies were very informative and helped us gain a better understanding of the CES course. Two schools were chosen to participate in these case studies which consisted of tiered interviews with principals, teachers, and students. The purpose of these interviews were to gather perceptions and experiences of the CES course from study participants.

We learned about the experiences of students who took the course and how it affected their personal and academic growth. Findings also revealed slight variations in course delivery and the support provided by school systems such as the district, administrators, and schools. Additionally, some feedback was given for improving future course development and delivery. Each of these elements are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

“Open-minded”: Perspective Shift

The students unanimously agreed that taking the course had broadened their perspectives or helped them become more “open-minded.” Specifically, students discussed how this course

changed their outlook on life, helped them become more comfortable expressing their opinions and thoughts, exposed them to various cultures, and increased their understanding of power and oppression. One student, for instance, shared how the course had altered her mindset into her own lived realities as she shared, “I’m not a disabled person, I’m a person with a disability.” This seemingly minor shift in language had profound implications for that student.

Students’ journal entries also revealed how much they had grown intellectually and personally. While some students were initially hesitant to share their thoughts in group discussions, their journal entries were full of insightful reflections. The teachers were impressed by the students’ progress and often commented on it. For example, one teacher said, “I don’t think they realized how much they needed this class” after reading the journal entries.

Student Critical Self and Societal Reflection

Students expressed that their engagement with this course not only changed their perspectives but made them think critically about the world, especially in relation to their own identities. Through all interviews with teachers, administrators, and students, it was evident that the most impactful unit for students was the unit of identity. In this unit, students learned more about their own identities, the identities of others, and their relationship to power and oppression in U.S. society. One teacher indicated:

They had a really good self-discovery of who they are and their own privileges, understanding they have privileges, and they can do something to help others who don’t. The identities that society has made to feel beneath, they’re understanding why things are the way they are, not just to accept it, but to overcome it. Now that I have XYZ identity, what can I do to resist and fight to make things more right?

This quote speaks to how society shapes marginalized identities and how the course offers ways to “resist and fight to make things right.” This learning about self and others was vastly different from their other courses as one student explained, “My math class or other classes will grade you based on what you got for the answer. This class is about you, about other cultures [edited for clarity].”

Students often mentioned how they applied the concepts learned in the course (e.g. Critical Consciousness) to their everyday life. They often found themselves thinking deeply about life events and societal happenings in relation to the principles learned in class. This further demonstrates how their engagement with the CES course pushed them to think critically about themselves and the world around them.

Course Differentiation From Teacher to Teacher

We found that there were slight differences in teachers’ overall approach to the course. Like other required courses, the district provided a sample syllabus with lessons to guide teaching which can be adapted based on the teacher. This framework assisted teachers in reaching the desired outcomes of the course. However, as one teacher stated, “for all ethnic studies teachers, it’s a matter of personal research [and] making it relevant to the local and immediate.” This indicates that the course, like many other required courses, is implemented differently from teacher to teacher. Additionally, the inherent nature of ethnic studies requires the teacher to

extract from their expertise while simultaneously making it relevant to the students' lived realities. The paragraphs below will briefly discuss some of these differences.

One teacher informed us that they incorporated new lessons to improve the course experience for students. More specifically, this teacher stated:

I'm going to teach a lesson on allyship, co-conspirator, and accomplice and what that looks like for solidarity because it's the one lesson that I noticed was missing from everything. We say we want solidarity, but then we don't teach them how to do solidarity. So, I'm adding that piece personally for my kids because it's a conversation that popped up last semester.

This quote helps us understand that the inclusion of this lesson, which is in alignment with the course objectives, was informed by prior classroom discussions and dialogue. Furthermore, there are current efforts being made to construct a new version of CES within SPPS schools. This new course would extend and expand on the learnings from the required course and serve as an elective for interested students. These insights speak to the iterative nature of the course and the importance of teacher responsiveness to the students they serve.

The other teacher emphasized the importance of relationship building and ensuring the content reflected the student demographic and local community context. This teacher stated that the first 4-5 weeks of the course focused on:

...relationship building...introducing our names to table mates, usually, a prompt, like, how did you get your name, something an elder has taught you, something you're passionate about, some prompts to build connections to each other, build solidarity within the classroom, but [mainly] relationships activities.

This same teacher continued by adding how their delivery and selection of the course content is primarily informed by the student demographics, interests, and local context.

Overall, the teachers were responsive to their students and modified the course to meet their students' needs while also striving to achieve the desired course objectives. These examples highlight two slightly nuanced differences in teaching this course: one being the incorporation of new course content and the development of an elective course, whereas the other prioritized relationship-building activities amongst students.

System Support

Principals, teachers, and students all indicated that they feel supported with the CES course. School leaders spoke highly of the support from the school board and superintendent. The SPPS Superintendent provided welcoming comments at the CES Professional Development Institute for teachers hosted by the ES Department in August 2022 and also spoke at the CES Student Showcase in June 2023, and a school board member attended the second Family Forum event. This sent a clear message district wide which was appreciated by school leaders. Additionally, the ES Department provided support to teachers and administrators within the district. For example, one teacher mentioned how Mouakong and Xue stepped in to advocate for them so

they could better focus on the CES course delivery. Additionally, school leaders provided teachers with instructional and capacity support, as much as they could. They had ongoing conversations with teachers and provided feedback as needed to assist course instruction. One school leader indicated the desire to increase more full-time staff to teach critical ethnic studies to support the lone teacher currently instructing the course.

Formative Feedback

There was very minimal formative feedback to support future course development and delivery from interview participants. The feedback related to course experiences and district support. More specifically, one student articulated that having more “hands on experiences” in the course would be helpful for learning. It is important to note that this is the only student that mentioned what they would change about the course; all other students said nothing should be changed.

School administrators offered feedback about ways the district can support and continue to show support as the years progress. One mentioned how facilitated collaboration opportunities to meet and share with other school administrators across the district would be helpful. Due to the new requirement of the course and the variance of implementation, it would be helpful to be in a cohort with others to learn ways they can best support the course. The other school administrator noted the importance of continued support from the district for future course success, especially related to power and oppression, “we have to make sure our mouths and feet are moving in the same direction. Far too often in education, we start things, but then we don’t follow through.”

Challenges Teaching Course

Aligned with the different approaches of teaching the course, educators mentioned a few challenges they experienced while teaching CES. Although teachers mentioned the importance of their own personal research and needing to make it relevant to the students, one mentioned how this also makes the course challenging to teach. As stated:

All teachers in this field have to be creative, no text book, tap into my creativity. How can I be more creative in terms of teaching this course? How do I teach it so that students are understanding and engaging more. Another challenge, there’s so much high-level vocab, a lot of the terms get recycled through the semester. It’s hard to create a vocab list, teach words as you approach it

Furthermore, teachers also spoke to the challenge of getting students involved in the course. One teacher spoke to the tough task of getting students to speak during classroom discussions, they pointed to this struggle as a result of teaching the “zoom generation.” They also mentioned that, because this is a required course, there are varying levels of investment from students. Some students are very committed to the course and content, whereas others take it simply because they are required to.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Growing from the advocacy of SPPS students participating in SEAB, the ethnic studies graduation requirement in SPPS was intended to center the stories and lived experiences of people of color and marginalized communities as well as teach critical thinking. Findings from this evaluation suggest that, in many classes, the CES course achieved those goals in the first

year of implementation. Students, for example, learned about their own and their peers' identities and cultures, studied resistance movements led by people of color and marginalized communities, built community within their CES classes, and challenged themselves to learn from their peers, even when they disagreed.

Among our evaluation findings are also recommendations to consider as the CES course is implemented in future years. These recommendations are intended to help SPPS leaders enhance the CES course in accomplishing its intended purposes and consider how to expand ethnic studies in SPPS beyond the current 10th grade CES course. Recommendations include:

1. System-wide curriculum adjustments

- a. Expand ethnic studies beyond a one-semester stand alone course by integrating ethnic studies within all disciplinary content in SPPS. In SEAB's original proposal to the SPPS board, former students advocated for Ethnic Studies as both a stand alone course and integrated within all disciplinary content within SPPS. Although Ethnic studies is its own course, the SPPS curriculum at large is not reflective of minoritized students' realities. Our findings should challenge SPPS to examine ways elements of the ethnic studies curriculum (e.g., Power and Oppression) can be infused in other core classes (e.g., Math, Physics). For example, are non-westernized histories of Math considered when discussing course content? Are scientific discoveries made by African-American communities or African nations/cultures mentioned? We believe that these minor shifts can have profound implications for the experiences of all students, especially those marginalized.
- b. Create a year-long CES course. Students and teachers agreed that there is too much content to cover in one semester. With a year-long course, there would be more time to both broaden and go more in depth into current lessons.
- c. Consider adjusting when students take the current CES course, which is an introduction to ethnic studies, and expand CES course offerings. While teachers expressed a lack of student maturity at 10th grade and proposed the class be taught at 11th grade instead, students expressed that it would have been important to have the course earlier and existing research suggests that the transition from middle to high school may be an ideal time (Bonilla et al., 2021; Sacramento, 2019). Recent legislation passed by the Minnesota legislature requires that districts offer ethnic studies courses in high schools by 2026 and in elementary and middle schools by 2027 (Verges, 2023). Therefore, SPPS should consider offering a CES course in 9th grade and expanding CES courses to elementary and middle schools.

2. Course content modifications

- a. Feature content about a broader range of ethnically marginalized groups, including Asian, Indigenous, Karen, and Latiné communities. Students who are a part of these communities felt that there was little content representing these communities in the current course.
- b. Make content more accessible for students learning English and developing

literacy skills. Teachers expressed that these were challenges that need to be addressed in future iterations of the course.

- c. Include an explicit community-engaged course component. Throughout the duration of the course, students were able to undergo a transformational process, both on a personal and intellectual level. However, there was a noticeable absence of connection with the broader SPPS community, including interactions with community members, families, and students from other schools. This may also address the desire for more “hands-on experiences” for students to help students engage in a variety of ways and encourage students to speak up more in the CES course. As such, establishing an intentional, explicit community-engaged course component (e.g., service learning, civic engagement, volunteering) would improve the course experience for both students and the SPPS community.

3. Additional supports for teachers

- a. Teachers would benefit from more time to explore and build upon the curriculum provided because, as teachers shared, bringing one’s own experiences into the CES classroom and connecting to students’ experiences, identities, and cultures is an important part of teaching CES. This would also help teachers feel more confident in their abilities to teach CES. Alternatively, the district could seek out teachers with a degree to teach CES who might require less time to prepare.
- b. Communicating with families about CES, especially in culturally responsive ways, was challenging for teachers this year due to limited time and resources. In future years, CES teachers would benefit from more time and space as well as further guidance and resources for how teachers can communicate with families about CES in culturally responsive ways.

4. Future Research and/or Evaluation

- a. Since this evaluation reflects the first year of the SPPS CES requirement, it would be beneficial to measure the return on investment and the course’s effects on students, schools, and the broader community over time.

In conclusion, this report offers evidence to conclude that the first year of the SPPS CES requirement was implemented as planned. Significant effort was invested in this endeavor and overall, students and teachers felt the course was beneficial. The curriculum, resources, and ongoing support offered by the SPPS ES department may serve as a model for other districts or schools seeking to implement an ethnic studies curriculum.

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