



June 12, 2026

Texas State Board of Education
William B. Travis Building
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Re: Proposed New 19 TAC Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, Subchapter A, Elementary, Subchapter B, Middle School, Subchapter C, High School, and Subchapter D, Other Social Studies Courses

Members of the Texas State Board of Education,

Defending Education commends the Texas State Board of Education, Texas Education Agency, work group members, and content advisors for their proposed revision to the Social Studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

Overall, the proposed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for social studies offers reasonably comprehensive, content-rich standards that will provide Texas students with a sufficient foundation in history, geography, government, civics, and economics. We applaud the recommendation that educators use primary sources and strengthen relevance by connecting lessons to local topics and resources.

The elementary and middle school standards are the highlight of this revision. The 3x5x1 Model, which employs a layered, chronological, and spiraling configuration for grades K-8, is a thoughtful, research-based approach that will allow Texas students to create meaningful connections across topics, periods, and places.

Moreover, the innovative 8th-grade capstone course will allow educators to simultaneously synthesize elementary and middle school social studies content and prepare students for more advanced study in high school. Texas educators should welcome a model that both simplifies and systematizes the task of teaching complex concepts and events. Educators in other states should demand that social studies standards in their respective states replicate this sensible format.

General Considerations

The standards could benefit from greater specificity and definitions of key terms and concepts. This shortcoming can be addressed by providing educators with detailed instructional resources and high-quality professional development that aligns with the approved standards. Moreover, we urge the State

Board of Education to collaborate with teacher education programs in Texas to ensure that subject-area coursework provides adequate coverage of the topics outlined in the standards.

Additionally, we recommend replacing the term “world history” with the term “Western civilization.” The latter is much more compatible with the standards themselves. As early as third grade, the standards direct students to “study the development of early civilizations and their lasting influence on Western civilization, the United States, and Texas.” In fact, the enduring legacies of Western civilization are central themes that recur through middle and high school. As such, “Western civilization” is simply a more precise descriptor than “world history.”

The terms “Western civilization” and “world history” are not synonymous. As Stanley Kurtz details in his study [“The Lost History of Western Civilization,”](#) the widespread adoption of the term “world history” is a contemporary convention that reflects the political and ideological preferences of leftist academics at elite American universities who embraced relativism and globalization. Among this small but influential group, Western civilization became a scapegoat for the social and political ills they incorrectly perceived had originated in the Western tradition. “World history” is less a term of art than a subversive political statement that regrettably has gained widespread acceptance.

Finally, we note that the standards use the term “enslaved people” rather than “slave.” Modern historians and many mainstream publications prefer the term “enslaved people” because they contend that it emphasizes personhood and more accurately describes slavery’s arbitrary and involuntary nature. While we take no formal position on whether “enslaved” or “slave” is the more appropriate term to use for state social studies standards, we suggest adding a written explanation and assurances that educators will not be reprimanded for using the term “slave” in good faith. As eminent Civil War historian Eric Foner [observed](#), “Slave is a familiar word and if it was good enough for Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists who fought to end the system, it is good enough for me.”

Ethnic Studies in the Proposed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Defending Education investigations have revealed that ethnic studies courses in other states have been hijacked by far-left activists seeking to use these courses to advance their progressive ideological agendas. In 2025, Defending Education detailed this phenomenon in a report titled [K-12 Liberated Ethnic Studies Industrial Complex](#).

The report detailed 55 K-12 school districts that spent over \$17.5 million on ethnic studies professional development, curricula, textbooks, and programming. Subsequent reports about public school courses in [New Mexico](#) and [Minnesota](#) districts suggest a disturbing pattern of far-left organizations and universities flooding ethnic studies courses with extremist propaganda disguised as instructional resources. “Today, ethnic studies, masquerading as the study of ‘history’ and ‘culture,’ has become a primary vehicle to advance a deeply divisive, anti-American and antisemitic, far-left political programming and activism,” Defending Education’s research director Rhyen Staley [observed](#).

Regrettably, Texas is not immune to this trend. Standard (d)(4)(B) in the Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies course directs educators to “identify the contributions of significant individuals from

the civil rights era, including Dolores Huerta, Reies López Tijerina, José Ángel Gutiérrez, Rubén Salazar, Emma Tenayuca, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, Marcario García, Hector P. García, Raul "Roy" Perez Benavidez, Martha P. Cotera, Jovita Idár, Jovita González de Mireles, Sara Estela Ramírez, Leonor Villegas de Magnon, Adela Sloss Vento, María L. de Hernández, and Alicia "Alice" Dickerson Montemayor (H, G/Civ, Geo/C, E)."

A handful of these individuals warrant inclusion and celebration. Marcario García was wounded during the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944, and President Harry Truman awarded García the Medal of Honor a year later, becoming the first Mexican immigrant to receive the honor. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan awarded Raul "Roy" Perez Benavidez the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism during the Vietnam War. Others, including Sara Estela Ramírez and María L. de Hernández, championed equality, challenged discriminatory laws, and fought to expand educational and economic opportunities for Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era and beyond. Texas students *should* learn, and take pride in, their laudable contributions to the state and nation.

Yet, a number of individuals in the list do not warrant inclusion in the Texas social studies standards. Defending Education strongly objects to the inclusion of Dolores Huerta in the proposed social studies standards for both Grade 7 and the Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies course. Following the publication of a *New York Times* [investigation](#) earlier this year, Huerta released a [statement](#) on March 18, 2026, admitting that she buried disturbing, decades-long episodes of sexual abuse, assault, and rape perpetrated by labor leader Cesar Chavez because "building the movement and securing farmworker rights was my life's work."

Apparently, at no time before or following Chavez's death in 1993 did Huerta feel compelled to divulge Chavez's grotesque record of sexual violence toward women in the farmworker rights movement. Instead, she spent decades celebrating the erection of statues, the publication of countless tributes and hagiographies, and the renaming of schools, buildings, and thoroughfares in Texas and elsewhere in Chavez's honor. The decision to include Huerta in the proposed social studies standards sends a message to young adults in Texas that "heroes" are right to conceal revolting behavior if they believe their cause is "right" or "just." Beneath the veneer of a movement championing the rights of farmworkers lay a moral rot perpetrated by Chavez and enabled by Huerta.

Other civil rights leaders included in the standards are equally problematic. In addition to leading an armed takeover of a New Mexico courthouse in 1967, Reies López Tijerina spent a lifetime airing revolting political views. In his introduction to Tijerina's "They Called Me King Tiger: My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights," activist and emeritus professor at the University of Texas at Arlington José Ángel Gutiérrez described Tijerina as "[a]lways charismatic, but at times venal and racist." In her biography of Tijerina, [The King of Adobe: Reies López Tijerina, Lost Prophet of the Chicano Movement](#), Lorena Oropeza notes,

In his same 1970s-era reminiscence, Tijerina wrote that he did not even understand hating Hitler, who, after all, had never set foot in the United States, whereas Americans had crossed the Atlantic to invade Germany.

Tijerina's remarks about Nazi Germany foreshadowed later accusations of anti-Semitism. In 2010, Tijerina, when asked what he had learned about Jewish people while a student in Saspamco, instantly responded, "They were the Christ-killers!"

Oropeza observed that "warning of a vast Jewish conspiracy to take over the globe" was one of the core concerns throughout his life's work.

Beyond simply airing objectively troubling opinions, Oropeza writes that Tijerina had physically abused family members.

Furthermore, in 2010, when asked directly if he ever beat his children, Reies Tijerina, while initially taken aback by the question, finally answered, "I don't know, maybe. A *coscorrón, un pellizco* [a rap on the head with the knuckles, a pinch]. His daughter Rachel...contributed a clarifying comment about changing social norms: "Nowadays it would be called child abuse, but back then there was no such thing." Or as she said when her father was not nearby, "He used to beat us real bad."

Unfortunately, these passages only skim the surface of Tijerina's nauseating opinions and his extraordinarily problematic life.

José Ángel Gutiérrez, who is also included in the proposed TEKS social studies standards, maintained controversial views of his own. Gutiérrez described his desire to "reclaim" United States territory in the Southwest to restore Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs. His vision of Aztlán informed a radical, irredentist belief that the American Southwest is the rightful territory of Aztec descendants. In a 1999 [interview](#), Gutiérrez proclaimed,

This entire region, as it becomes more Mexican and Latino, will blur the border. As it is, that's an antiquated concept. The border is porous. It only exists for police purposes and security purposes. Ideas, disease, commerce, even people cross that border regularly, legally, and illegally. This whole region will become the new Meso-America once again.

Gutiérrez expanded on this idea in a trilogy of novels: "Dystopia and Derailment: Gringo Politics in the Building of Aztlán," "Redemption and Retribution: Aztlan Begins Again," and "Aztlán: A Nation Within a Nation." According to the published description, these books were "focused on the key concepts of ethnic identity, organization, strategic plans for empowerment, visioning the mobilization of resources, and implementation of the overall goal of realizing Aztlán."

The third volume, "[Aztlán: A Nation Within a Nation](#)," offers a remarkably infantile premise. In 2020, "Donald Chump" loses the presidential election to "Joe Bitten." Instead of conceding the election, Chump dismisses Congress, declares a national emergency, invalidates the election, deploys the military, and declares himself "Continuing Interim President of the United States." He directs armed, "white-led" militias to patrol a 40-foot border wall erected along the U.S.-Mexico border during his first term. A group of freedom fighters using slogans like "Paint the White House Brown" lead the resistance.

His 2025 ostensibly nonfiction commentary on contemporary politics, “LETTERS: Education by Gutiérrez,” suggested that his fictional account was a reflection of his sincere beliefs. “Make no mistake,” Gutiérrez declares in the preface of the collection of letters, “Trump intends to establish an authoritarian state, the U.S. of Trump (UST), dismantling existing institutions to accommodate his vision.” Gutiérrez’s vision, on the other hand, aligns with the pro-collectivism, anti-Israel, and pro-Aztlán far-left.

Gutiérrez is not the only pro-Aztlán insurrectionist represented in the TEKS standards. Boxer and political activist Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales co-founded an alternative political party called the Congreso de Aztlán. Gonzales advanced [El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán](#), a nationalist manifesto produced by the First Chicano National Conference in 1969 that decried the “brutal ‘gringo’ invasion of our territories” and declared “the independence of our mestizo nation.”

In addition to the examples cited above, we urge a comprehensive re-evaluation of individuals identified in other standards for the Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies course. For example, standard (d)(5)(B) includes playwright Cherrie L. Moraga and feminist philosopher Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa. In a 2001 preface to [“This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,”](#) Moraga opined,

In my recurring dream of a different América, just as in the replays on the network news, the World Trade Center, along with the Pentagon surely fall to the ground in defeat; but, in my dream, there are not 20,000 workers inside. In my dream, we, the workers, are not fodder for the US crimes of greed. In my dream, the profiteers pay, not us. As I told a friend, "If Indigenous América had blown up the Pentagon, I'd be dancing in the streets, too." Is it heresy to state this? But that is just a dream.

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, who coedited “The Bridge Called My Back,” [admitted](#) to feeling “intense sexuality” toward her father in an oft-mentioned 1983 interview. Throughout her career, in fact, Anzaldúa espoused a variety of disturbing views of human sexuality that do not warrant elaboration in a comment on academic standards, let alone inclusion in the standards themselves.

We understand that the student demographics of the Texas public school population motivated the creation and development of the one-credit high school Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies and Ethnic Studies: African American Studies courses. Yet, even well-intentioned courses that attempt to be responsive to the interests of major racial and ethnic subgroups may have the unintended consequence of introducing students to the kinds of political extremism that most Texans would rightly reject.

We contend that the Mexican American and African American content embedded in the required social studies courses provides ample treatment of the topics included in the Mexican American and African American ethnic studies courses. One compromise would be to convert the Mexican American Studies course into a Latin American History course that would explore the rich and dynamic histories of diverse inhabitants throughout the region. Likewise, the African American Studies course could be

converted into an African American History course, starting from the development of the transatlantic slave trade and concluding with an exploration of contemporary challenges and achievements.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for social studies. Defending Education would be happy to provide additional information about any of the concerns described here. In addition, if we can be of service going forward, please do not hesitate to contact the organization's president and vice president, Nicole Neily and Sarah Parshall Perry.