

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (two attachments)

June 16, 2021

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Lawmakers request public hearing on secretive PED effort to require critical race theory in classrooms

Santa Fe- A group of 15 House Republican lawmakers today requested the interim Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) conduct an immediate hearing to provide oversight regarding the NM Public Education Department's (PED) ongoing efforts to require critical race theory (CRT) be included in "redeveloping" core NM K-12 Social Studies Standards. The PED's efforts to date have included creating a handed-picked working group of pro-CRT advocates to develop eight "guiding principles" to help ensure this controversial anti-American viewpoint will be included in a new social studies academic curriculum. PED has also selected a group of 60 "volunteers" from across the state to draft proposed new standards, as well as hired a left-leaning think tank from Washington, DC to provide technical assistance in creating these new social studies standards. These efforts by PED to begin changing current social studies standards are moving forward with little to no public notice, restricting parent and community involvement in these important decisions.

Due to the lack of public involvement in drafting these new, proposed standards, House GOP legislators believe it is essential that legislative oversight hearings be conducted to ensure that policymakers and the general public can thoroughly understand the, so far secretive, process of rewriting K-12 social studies standards and ascertain what impact these "guiding principles" will have on any proposed new standards, and to understand why only advocates of critical race theory were involved in creating these principles on behalf of PED.

Lawmakers are concerned not only with the ramifications of teaching theories, such as CRT, but that the process used to move forward in writing these new standards has been uncommonly exclusive. In the interest of public transparency, PED's actions and the discussions surrounding the creation of these new standards require review by the Legislature in order to ensure the public's trust is not further eroded by the secrecy and one-sided approach PED has utilized so far in developing this new curriculum.

By requesting this public hearing from the LESC, it will be the first step in ensuring concerned parents and other stakeholders will have a real voice in identifying and opposing any standard which tries to impose CRT upon NM's students.

Additionally, House GOP was made aware of a separate letter, submitted to PED, from a local superintendent outlining their concerns with the process thus far (letter is attached).

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June 15, 2021

Deputy Secretary Warniment,

Throughout my tenure as a New Mexico Public School Administrator, I have learned valuable lessons about successfully managing large-scale change. Moving an entire organization is no easy feat and can be a delicate thing, especially when change involves or is tied to controversial topics. I am reaching out to you with concern about the approach being taken to revise our Social Studies Standards. Although there may have been no intent for the revision of the standards to become a controversial or sensitive matter, I assure you there are high levels of uncertainty and unrest across my community due to the revisions currently underway, and I suspect this may be true in other New Mexico communities as well.

Taking time on the front end of a change initiative to build understanding around the “why” and the “how” associated with the change has always proven to be a valuable investment. Change that springs from a place of commitment has far greater possibilities than change resulting from compliance alone. Commitment comes when people are authentically engaged in the process and have had the opportunity to learn and evolve and understand along the way. Resistance results when people are moved to a place of feeling without voice or influence in the process. Unfortunately, what I’m observing in my community, and suspect may also be happening elsewhere, is resistance. I’d like to offer my thoughts and observations about the reasons why this may be occurring.

The process used for stakeholder input has not included *authentic* opportunities for engagement and feedback. Sufficient advance notice of “focus group” sessions was lacking and these meetings occurred after many school districts had already released students and staff for the summer break, thus reducing rates of participation across adequate cross-sections of stakeholder audiences. The focus group presentations did not invite dialogue, questioning, debate, or opportunities to identify and clarify misconceptions. The meetings had the feeling of being hurried in order to limit opportunity for real conversation, and they felt very staged and one-sided. CMS attendees left the meeting questioning the motives and intent of the presenters and of the revisions to the standards. Transparency was alluded to but was not at all what was experienced.

Additionally, although a survey was sent following the session that initially seemed to offer a vehicle for providing authentic feedback, the window to respond to the survey was suspiciously small, especially in light of the NMSBA Law Conference being held concurrently with the focus group sessions. A sincere desire for input from attendees was not felt at all. Instead, the sessions felt like an artificial attempt to pacify the need for public input on such potentially contentious changes to our Social Studies curriculum. Simply put, the process employed for the focus groups

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fell dramatically short, even if the content under discussion in the focus groups had not been controversial and misunderstood. The process undermined the trust that is necessary when confronting controversial and challenging topics. It seems recovering trust may be an important next step.

The timing of the revision of the standards appears to be ahead of the anticipated schedule. From the information presented in the focus group session, it seems as though the new standards are on track for implementation a full year before the next Social Studies materials adoption. This also raises suspicion and causes some to wonder if there is a connection to political terms of current government leaders. Although there may be no correlation whatsoever, it is important to point out this is widely believed by many stakeholders in this part of the state.

There is a widespread concern of a strong correlation of the impending revision of the Social Studies standards with “Critical Race Theory”. Whether or not there is an intentional connection, NMPED leaders are encouraged to confront this concern head on, and to clearly and confidently call out the similarities and the differences between revisions to the standards and the controversial “Critical Race Theory”.

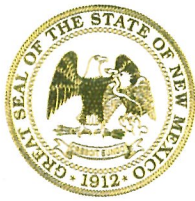
New Mexico public school educators, families, and citizens deserve the opportunity to contribute towards the revision of these standards through meaningful discussion and debate. Reaching consensus on these revisions is essential, especially in light of the current political climate and all that New Mexicans have experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Reaching consensus requires authentic dialogue and sufficient opportunities to build understanding. Without such opportunity, many will continue to respond with resistance because of their underlying fear that controversial social and political views are being forcefully imposed upon New Mexico public schools through the revision of the Social Studies standards.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Renee Russ

Renee Russ
Superintendent
Clovis Municipal Schools
575-769-4320



State of New Mexico
House of Representatives

State Capitol

Santa Fe

June 16, 2021

State Senator William P. Soules, Chair
State Representative G. Andres Romero, Vice Chair
Legislative Education Study Committee
325 Don Gaspar, Suite 100
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Sen. Soules and Rep. Romero:

It has come to our attention that the Public Education Department (PED) is beginning to undertake the necessary steps to “redevelop” New Mexico’s K-12 Social Studies Standards. It is our understanding PED’s actions taken to date have included the creation of a working group of educators who will do the actual writing of the proposed standards, the utilization of a voluntary focus group made up of parents, students and anyone else who was interested in participating, and the creation of eight “guiding principles” that will be used to help determine if proposed new standards address the goals set by PED.

These “guiding principles,” however, are extremely troubling as they appear to be based upon the premise of implementing in New Mexico’s schools many components of the so-called critical race theory that has been embraced by progressive advocates across the country. We believe a vast majority of New Mexico parents do not want critical race theory taught to their children and the actions of PED to impose such standards as part of the Social Studies curriculum “redevelopment” effort demand legislative oversight and consultation.

Therefore, we request the Legislative Education Study Committee schedule an interim public hearing immediately so that policymakers and the general public can thoroughly understand the process of rewriting K-12 Social Studies Standards; ascertain what impact these “guiding principles” will have on any proposed new standards and why only advocates of critical race theory were involved in creating these principles; and ensure concerned parents and other stakeholders will have a real voice in identifying and opposing any standard which tries to impose critical race theory upon our students.

Although the Legislature does not traditionally become involved in PED’s curriculum development activities, the issue of whether critical race theory is an appropriate subject matter in our schools is so controversial that it does require the Legislature to undertake a review of PED’s goals and actions. For example, the “guiding principles” mentioned earlier contain the following problematic statements:

- “Incorporating major historical themes such as power, class conflict, struggle, geo political impact, social justice, equity and diversity through standards teach these topics in developmentally appropriate ways”
- “Identify tools to share authentic stories including the study of relationships between power and oppression”
- “Empowering students to develop pride in his/her/theory identify, history, culture, region by incorporating a community based approach while preparing students to be a part of a global environment”
- “Ensuring divergence from a singular Eurocentric cultural script...”

- “Supporting the development of a strong critical historical consciousness”...
- “Utilizing historical events from a future focused orientation and developing a future focused orientation that allows students to be critical thinkers in considering historical context in mending, healing, and transforming future interactions”

While these “guiding principles” are worded in such a way to sound innocuous and well-meaning, we all know that various phrases --- such as “social justice,” or “equity and diversity,” or “power and oppression” --- are political buzz words that are used by advocates to advance controversial agendas and impose their nontraditional values on unsuspecting children in the classroom. It is also quite evident there is a thin line between teaching children critical thinking and teaching children what to think.

Further, it is also fair to point out that several of these “guiding principles” are so vague and open to interpretation that it is difficult to ascertain what academic goal educators must achieve. The goals appear to be designed to achieve a political agenda, rather than actually teaching a balanced approach to Social Studies.

Based upon the experiences of other states and local communities who have or are debating the appropriateness of including critical race theory into academic studies, New Mexico cannot cede cart-blanche authority to a bureaucratic state agency to make this important decision. Rather, our state should have legislative hearings that are fully advertised and open to parents, educators, and others who deserve to be heard in regards to their opinions of whether or not critical race theory should be mandated upon local school districts and taught to our state’s students.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for a future Legislative Education Study Committee hearing on this important topic.

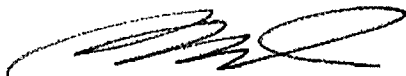
Sincerely,



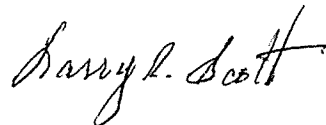
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Republican Whip



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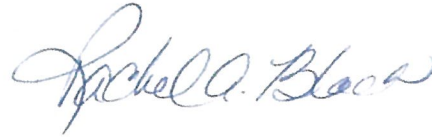
Gail Armstrong
State Representative District 49



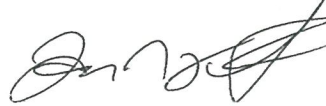
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