

Sustaining Ethnic Studies as it Grows

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Why Ethnic Studies?



An Academic Space for Communities of Color

- Desire to see knowledge and experiences of communities of color reflected in classrooms
- Ethnic Studies was response to this desire in higher ed
- Families, communities, and teachers organized to bring Ethnic Studies to K-12



What is Ethnic Studies?



What is Ethnic Studies?

- Centers communities of color, their histories, experiences, counternarratives, & cultural wealth
- Engages theories and practices of organizing, resistance, & liberation
- Goal of eliminating racism & other forms of oppression
- Uses anti-racist & critically sustaining pedagogies
- Embeds community responsive & caring practices
- Cultivates empathy, humanization, communal identities, & radical healing



Adapted from Xito, 2023

The ARC of Ethnic Studies

- **Access:** provides students opportunities to receive quality education, & urges educational institutions to open their doors to more students of color.
- **Relevance:** connects to the marginalized experiences of students of color.
- **Community:** bridges formal educational spaces and students' communities through involvement, advocacy, organizing, & activism. Students leverage their education towards the betterment of their communities.

Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2014

Intellectual Support for Ethnic Studies

- Uses Culturally Relevant & Sustaining Pedagogies
 - Prioritizes academic success
 - Provides a way for students to maintain cultural integrity
 - Develops awareness of & an ability to critique social inequality

Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010

Intellectual Support for Ethnic Studies

- Supports students' positive ethnic-racial identity development
- Parallels Social-Psychological Interventions
 - Provides forewarning about stereotypes
 - Affirms personal values
 - Promotes social belonging
 - Cultivates growth mindset (capacity to learn)
 - Develops external attributions for life challenges

Ben-Zeev et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Johns et al., 2007; Yeager et al., 2019; Umana-Taylor, 2018; Santos, Kornieko, & Rivas-Drake et al. 2017

Growing Evidence of ES Impacts

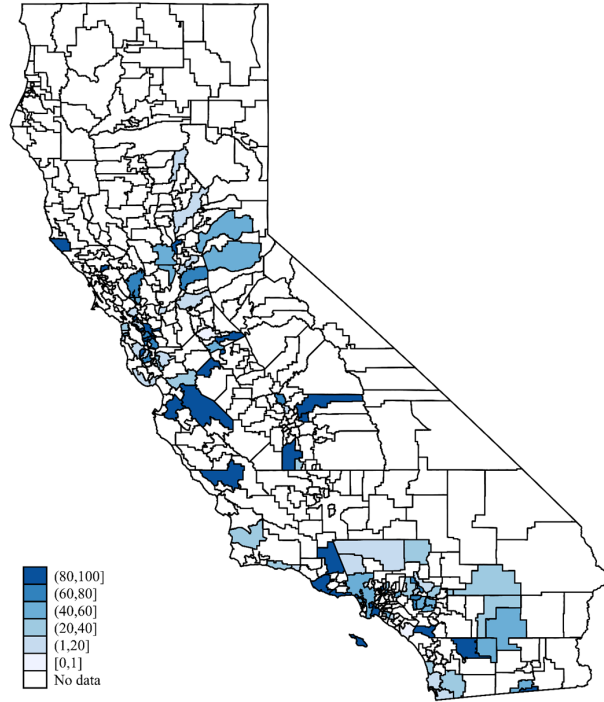
- Qualitative & case-study evidence
 - Increases school connectedness, motivation, ethnic identity, sense of empowerment, self concept, critical thinking, achievement (Lewis, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006; Lewis et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2008; Belgrave et al., 2000; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2017; Halagao, 2004; 2010; Vasquez, 2005)

Growing Evidence of ES Impacts

- Large-scale descriptive quantitative evidence
 - Tucson MAS associated with large increase in HS graduation rates (Cabrera et al., 2014)
- Causal evidence from SFUSD pilot
 - Students with 8th grade GPA < 2.0 nudged to take ES
 - Students experienced large increases in GPA, attendance, credits earned, HS graduation, & post-secondary enrollment (Dee & Penner, 2017; Bonilla, Dee, & Penner, 2021)

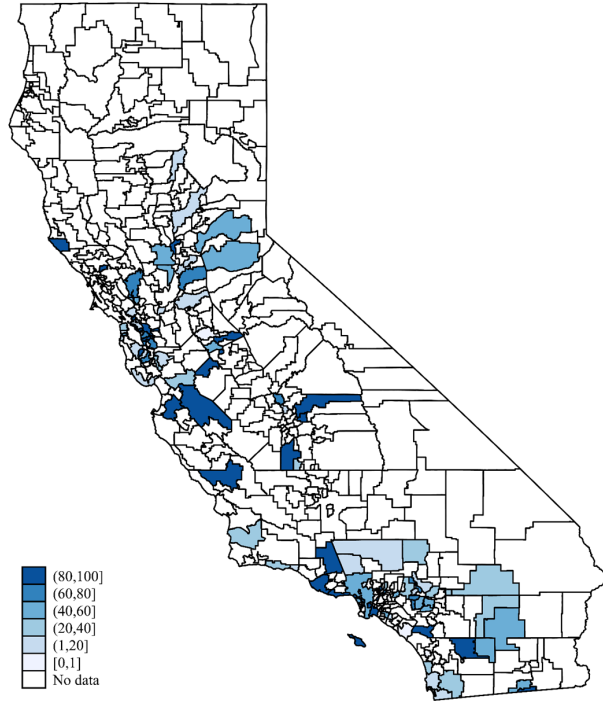
Student Access to ES Expanding across CA

2014-15

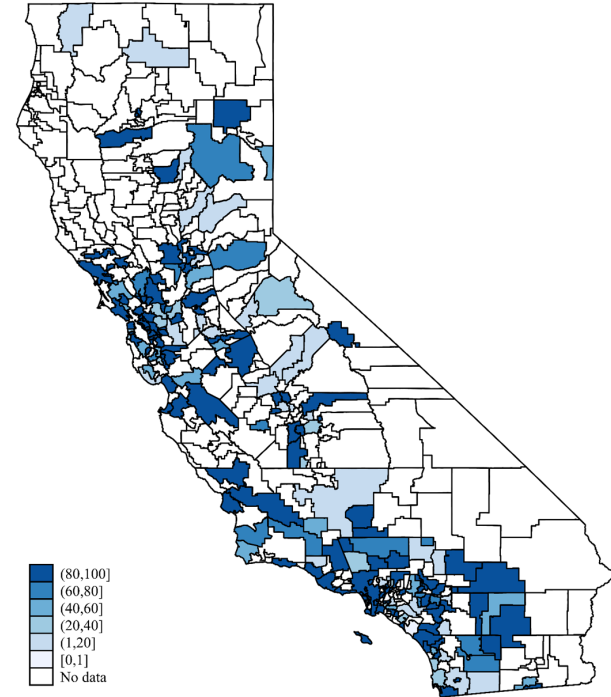


Student Access to ES Expanding across CA

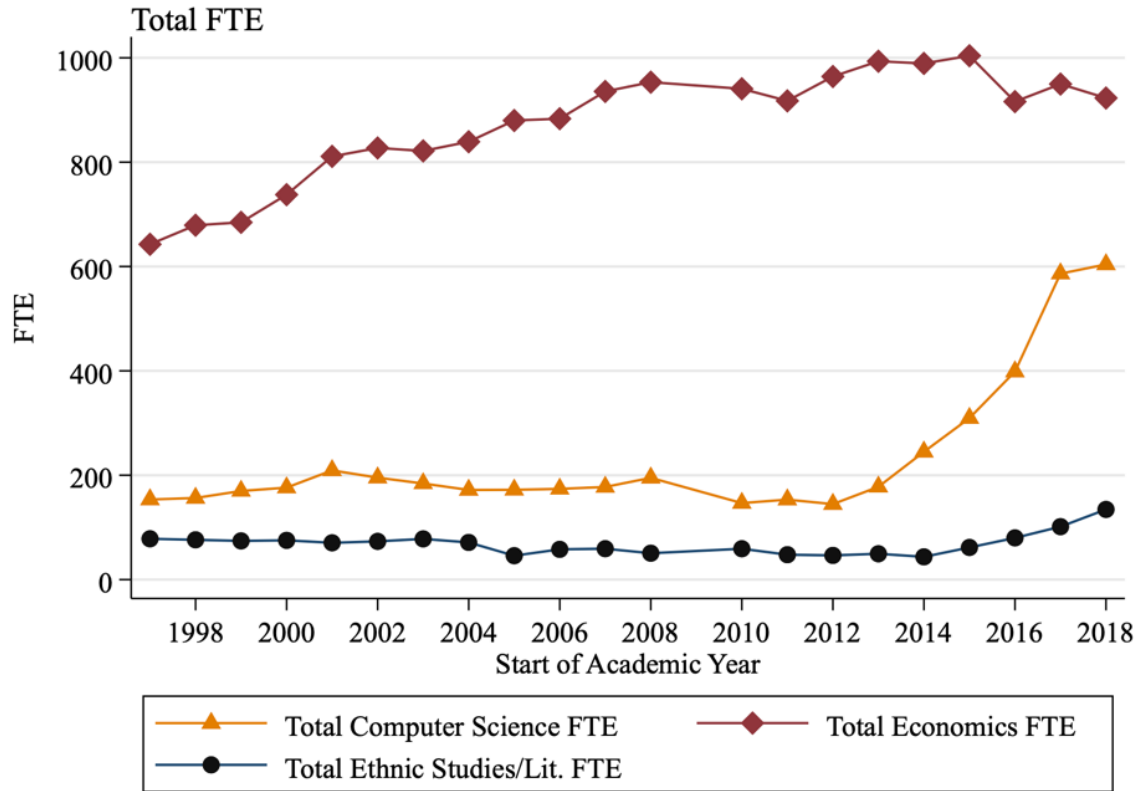
2014-15



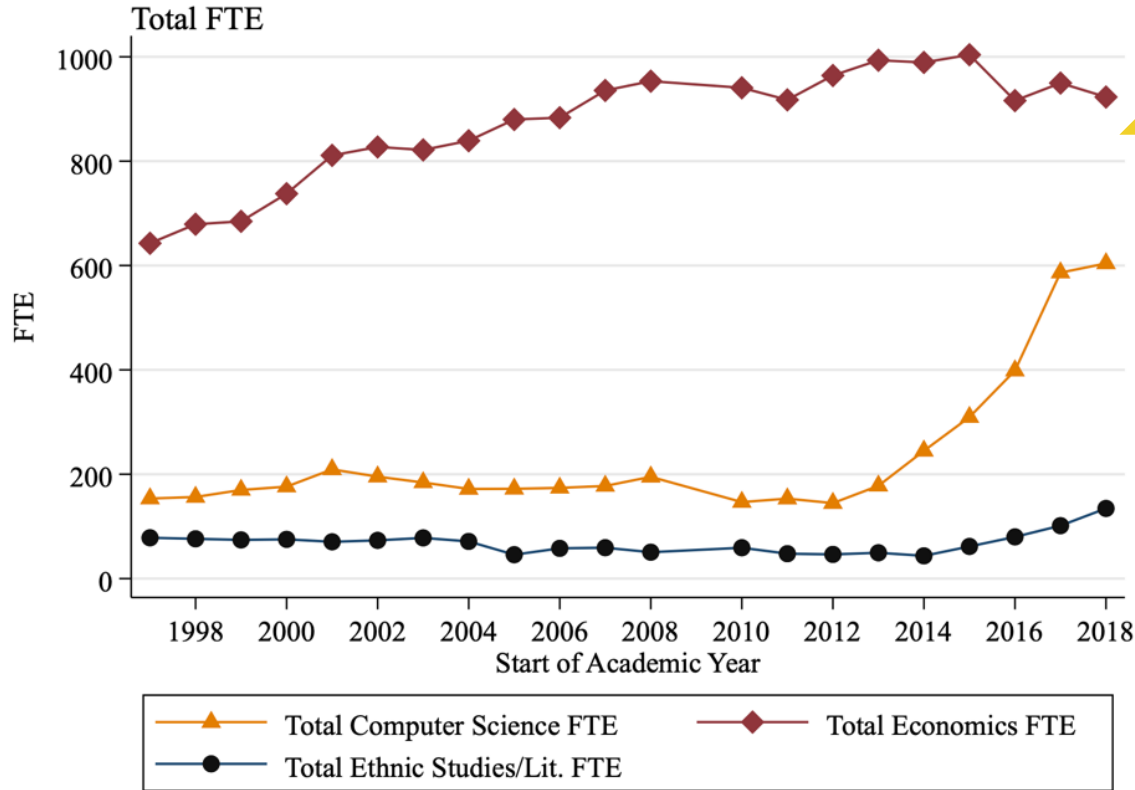
2020-21



Hundreds More ES Teachers Needed to Meet Grad Goal



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Need to
increase CA ES
teachers by
nearly 800
FTE

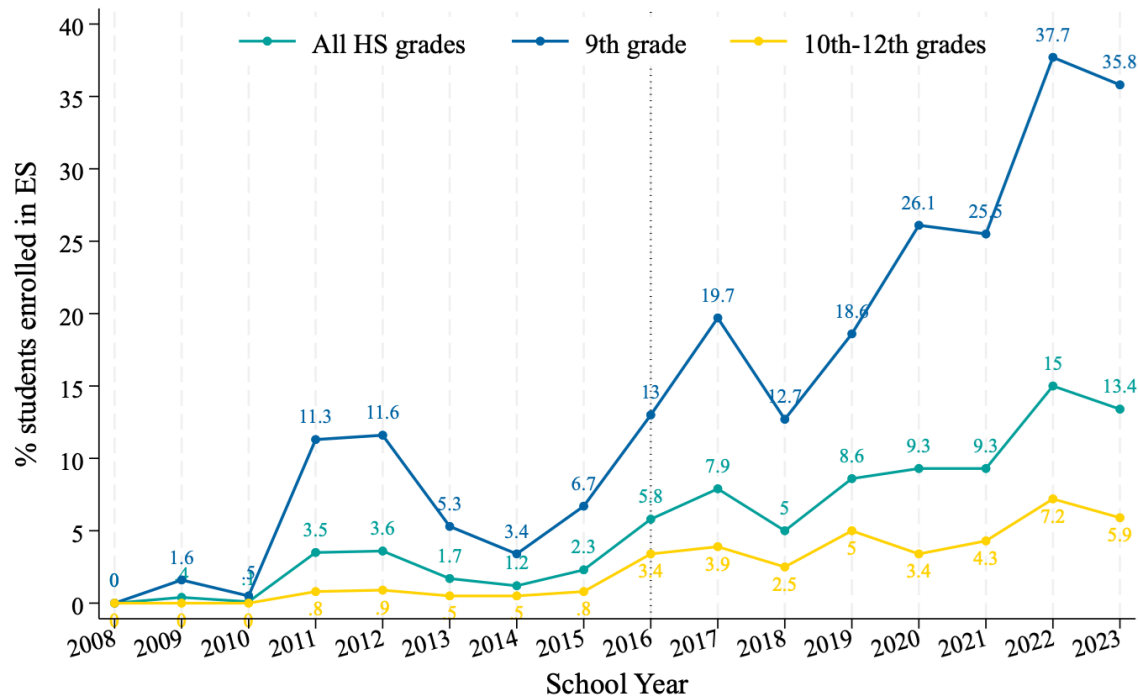


Examining Ethnic Studies as it Grows

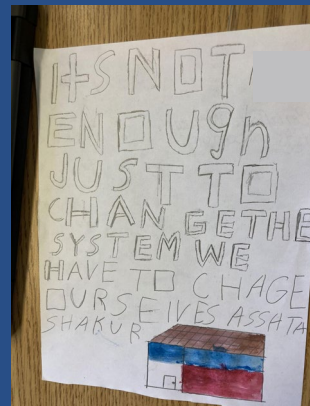
District Case Study
Oeste Unified



Substantial growth, but far from grad mandate



Notes. School Year indicates spring semester of a school year.

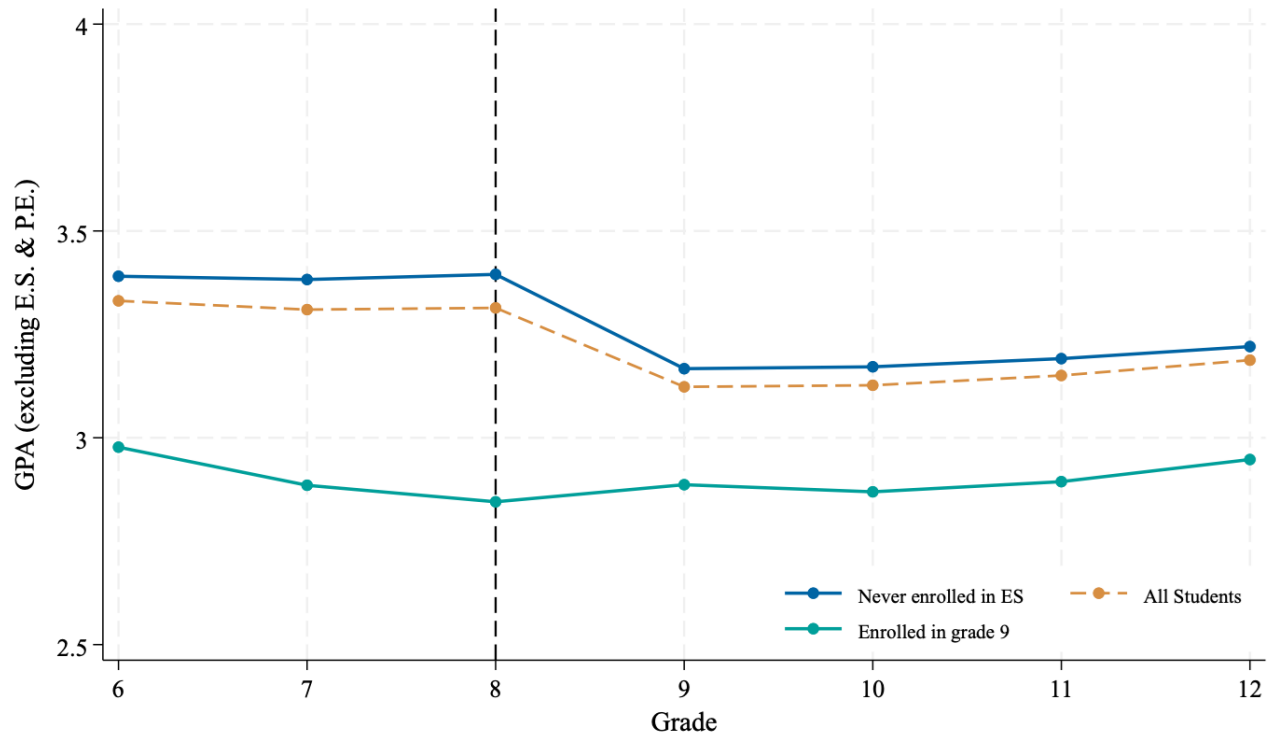


Have They Sustained Ethnic Studies Impacts as it Grew?

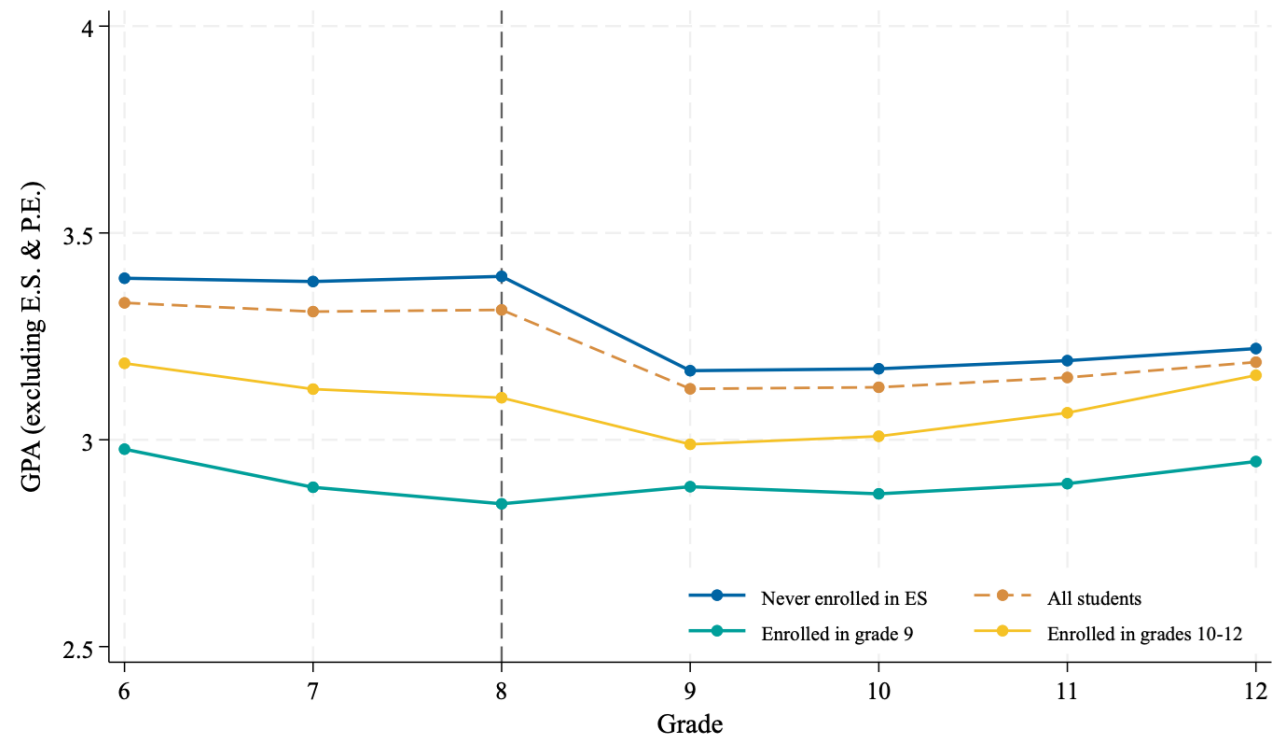
Impact on student academic outcomes

- Sample: Students in grades 6-12 from 2007-08 to 2022-23
 - ~24K unique students
 - 4,595 (19%) ever enroll in ES
- Data: Transcript including teacher assignment, grades
- Method: Comparing students to themselves before and after taking ES

GPA of ES and never ES students grades 6-12



GPA of ES and never ES students grades 6-12



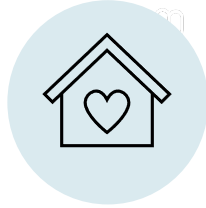
ES benefits ALL subgroups

- Effects on GPA are positive & significant for all subgroups
 - Racial/Ethnic Groups
 - Gender
 - Special Ed
 - English Learner
 - 8th grade GPA
- And negative for Any Ds/Fs
 - Except highest GPA group (3.0+) and Asian students
- Effects larger for more historically/academically marginalized groups

What Students Experience & Gain from Ethnic Studies



**KNOWLEDGE
& LOVE OF
SELF**



CONVIVENCIA



**AWARENESS OF
SYSTEMS OF POWER**



**COMMUNITY
CARE &
ENGAGEMENT**

“I think **I felt more assured in my identity**, and that has helped me with my confidence, because I know without ethnic studies, I feel like I definitely would've been more shy and just kind of kept to myself, and being able to look at those different perspectives and take the class, **I just feel better about myself and the space I take up in the world** and it just helped my confidence and all that.”

KNOWLEDGE & LOVE OF SELF



“I feel like we're not how other classes are. **We were actually treated like family...**We were able to open up with each other more. We were like, yeah, we're family. **I don't have this bond with other teachers, you know?”**

CONVIVENCIA



“I feel like during that time, early teens, you gotta start to develop and become your own person. You might not be aware of who you're becoming or what's going to happen, or this will help you. But **be aware of who's influencing in your life, who has power in your life, what systems are you a part of, what communities.**”

AWARENESS OF SYSTEMS OF POWER



“I will say that when I go to college I do **want to be involved in organizations or clubs that do **revolve around the humanity** of others or **equal opportunity** for more people.”**

COMMUNITY CARE & ENGAGEMENT



Living into the ARC

Oeste Unified dramatically increased Ethnic Studies **Access**
Its ES educators worked jointly to build a **Relevant** curriculum
that's built from and grounded in **Community care**

What & How

- Impressive improvement in GPA
- Infrastructure facilitating ownership & flexibility
- Redefined classroom experiences & relationships
- Reflexive & rigorous curriculum
- Integrity of implementation

Challenges Ahead & Key Questions

- Consistency of impacts on other outcomes and in other contexts
- Hurdles for teacher preparation, retraining existing teachers, navigating substantial budget cuts
 - How will other districts prepare without many existing experts and with limited state guidance on preparation?
- Debates about the content of courses & its alignment with tenets of ethnic studies
 - How can the course be tested, refined, and modified in the face of intense political opposition?



Thank you!
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