

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

December 17, 2020

Contact: Jeremy Bond
State Education Resource Center
C: (860) 754-6568
bond@ctserc.org

SERC Releases Documentary on CT's Black & Latino Studies Course

MIDDLETOWN, Conn. — Following approval of Connecticut's first model statewide curriculum, the State Education Resource Center (SERC) has released a documentary to inform communities, families, schools, and the general public about the course development process led by SERC.

The CT State Board of Education approved the African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino high school course of studies on December 2, as required by a state law signed in June 2019 that authorized SERC to develop and submit course curriculum materials by January 2021. The 36-minute film features the voices of a wide range of stakeholders involved in the effort.

The 150-member advisory group convened by SERC included K-12 and college educators, historians and museum representatives, parents, students, community advocates, and the lawmakers who sponsored Public Act 19-12, State Senator Douglas McCrory, State Representative Bobby Sanchez, and State Representative Bobby Gibson. In the documentary, they explain the reasoning behind the course, how it came about, the purpose behind its structure, and their vision for education in Connecticut that reflects diverse perspectives.

"I am moved by the fact that I represent an organization—the State Education Resource Center—that has been selected to coordinate this effort," SERC Executive Director Ingrid M. Canady says in the documentary, from a February event with lawmakers at the State Capitol. "And we are honored by this task, that I cannot even call it a task. I have to call it 'history in the making'."

The short film, "Making History: The creation of a statewide Black and Latino Course of Studies per CT PA 19-12," as well as additional information about the curriculum development, is available at www.ctserc.org/pa1912. School districts may offer the course beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, and all Connecticut high schools must offer the course by the 2022-2023 school year.

Some essential facts about the course elaborated on in the documentary include:

- The course is the first of its kind to combine both African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino studies into one course that all school districts are required to offer. The course is a full-year elective, and while it has a semester-by-semester focus, it is intentionally designed to accentuate the individual and joint contributions of these groups to our collective history. The purposeful integration into a single course will better assist students in their identity development as well as their content knowledge.

(Continued)

SERC Documentary on CT's Black & Latino Studies Course *(Continued)*

- The course expands accessibility to this critical content statewide. In the process of developing the course, SERC surveyed state high schools and learned that about 18-20 out of 206 schools were implementing some form of African American or Latino studies, but no school in Connecticut was yet teaching an integrated course, and research at the national level suggested the same. The course should not displace or supplant current course offerings, but provide an opportunity for districts to develop pathways of learning. As Sandra Clark, Supervisor of History and Social Studies for New Haven Public Schools, states in the film: “How about those schools that already teach the course? My answer is, there are a number of representatives who have shared resources, suggestions for practice, and recommended sequencing and that this will only enhance the social studies program within their schools.”
- By requiring the course statewide, Connecticut is helping to ensure that demographics do not determine who has access. “This is a course for all students, including students who identify as White,” says Dr. Daniel HoSang, Associate Professor of Ethnicity, Race & Migration, and American Studies at Yale University. “Black history is the history of *all* of this country. [Latino] history is the history of *all* of this country. So this history is for everyone.”
- Student perspective and advocacy drove the law that mandated the course development, and students had an integral role in shaping the course content. “We heard from students that yes, they wanted to hear the beauty, the historical greatness, of these peoples from the past, all the way to the present,” says Paquita Jarman-Smith, SERC consultant on the project team. “They wanted to learn about their legacy fighting for justice, they wanted to learn more about the arts, the sciences, the innovation, and the culture that has impacted our world in the past, today, and beyond.”

The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic didn't stop progress on curriculum development. Committee members continued to convene virtually and found their work had particular resonance during difficult times of racial and social unrest.

“The political context of the time complicated our work,” Jarman-Smith says. “Racial protests, Black men being killed, brought up so much within our communities, this urgency to make change. And the course was envisioned out of the past need, but it made so, so real with our present reality as a community here in Connecticut. In these times and within the context of our standards, we have to look at how we can build civic skills, racial consciousness skills, as well as teach history and find the balance.”

“I appreciate the curriculum in its boldness around not shying away from, and really struggling with, the realities of the history,” Karen Dubois-Walton, a State Board of Education member, said upon the Board's approval of the course. “I appreciated the centering of so much that's typically marginalized, and the ability for students to be able to dig in to that.”

“One piece that really brought me joy was the section on ‘Radical Reimagining,’ and opening that door for our students and for educators to work in partnership around a radical reimagining of what can be going forward, I think, is very exciting,” she said.

(Continued)

SERC Documentary on CT's Black & Latino Studies Course *(Continued)*

Education Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona praised SERC at the Board meeting for its leadership in developing the course. "You were partners in this whole process. The way you did it, the quality that you created, set a bar really high... because what we don't want is to present courses that provide low rigor and low pedagogy. We're excited."

"Let's not forget the connection between kids wanting to be in school and kids attending school," he said. "And when we see that our attendance rate with our Black and Latino students is worse, when we see that our achievement outcomes, our academic outcomes, are disparate in Connecticut, we have to take real action. And real action is being bold about saying we're going to put something in front of them where they feel they can connect."

Noelia Nunez, a senior at Abbott Technical High School in Danbury, told NBC Connecticut what it meant to have a pilot Latino history course offered at Abbott Tech. "It's become my safe space. It's become my zone, a sanctuary, because it's where we learn about who we were."

Nunez helped shape the course that SERC developed. "I'm very proud of it," she said. "Because in a way, we're rewriting history."

For curriculum updates, please visit www.ctserc.org/pa1912. For questions, contact these SERC Consultants and members of the project team: Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, (860) 632-1485 x321 or griffin@ctserc.org, or Nitza Diaz (Spanish-speaking), (860) 632-1485 x394 or diaz@ctserc.org.

###

The **State Education Resource Center (SERC)** (ctserc.org) is a quasi-public agency created to assist the Connecticut State Board of Education in promoting educational equity and excellence. SERC provides resources, professional learning, and a centralized library to educators, families, and community members in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education and other public and private partners.