



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on January 9, 2012

Ariz. DOE Says Tucson Schools' Ethnic Studies Illegal, Orders Funding Cut

According to the Arizona Department of Education, the Tucson Unified School District's Mexican-American studies curriculum is in violation of state law. The DOE of Arizona has therefore ordered that funding for the ethnic studies program be cut, an action that has provoked the ire of some of the district's residents.

Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal (left) indicates that 10 percent of the state funding to the program will be cut, retroactive to August — a maneuver which will leave the Tucson school district facing a nearly \$5-million funding loss. By June, that loss will be \$14 million.



Behind the funding cut is the notion that the ethnic-studies program is inherently anti-American and racist. The *Tucson Citizen* reports:

Last year, the state put into effect the ethnic-studies law, which bans classes that promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, encourage resentment toward a race or class of people, are designed solely for students of a certain ethnic background and advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of students as individuals.

That ethnic-studies law has placed the state at odds with the Tucson district's program because officials contend that the program is in violation of that law.

Huppenthal was one of the architects of the ethnic-studies law. He, along with his predecessor Tom Horne, who now serves as the state's Attorney General, created the law after having learned that the Mexican-American studies program was potentially creating racial tension.

Last year, parents of the Tucson School District were [angered](#) by the content of the ethnic studies curriculum and voiced their anger at a Tucson school board meeting. One mother took issue with one of the books in the course: "I want to know why books like this one are being taught to our kids." She explained that she confronted school administrators about the text and was told that the book was used in at least five classes, including third-graders.

She then proceeded to read jaw-dropping excerpts from the book — for example, "An Epic Poem":

I shed tears of sorrow, I sow seeds of hate,
The force of tyranny of men that rule by farce and hypocrisy,
In a country that has wiped out all my history, stifled all my pride...
My land is lost and stolen, My culture has been raped,
Poverty and city-living under the colonial system of the Anglo has frustrated our people's culture.
One note, especially to those young chicanos, hard drugs and the drug culture is the invention of



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the gringo because he has no culture.

We have to destroy capitalism...The Declaration of Independence states that we the people have the right to revolution, the right to overthrow a government that has committed abuses and seeks complete control over the people. This is in order to clean out the corrupted, rotten officials that developed out of any type of capitalistic systems.

Another section of the textbook reads, "Today I have a message....to the children, the students, the workers, the masses, and to the bloodsuckers, the parasites, the vampires who are the capitalists of the world: The schools are tools of the power structure that blind and sentence our youth to a life of confusion, and hypocrisy, one that preaches assimilation and practices institutional racism."

Parents pointed out a number of other controversial books, many of which contained expletives in both Spanish and English.

Likewise, Huppenthal collected a number of different texts and materials from the curriculum, and pointed out the inflammatory and racially-motivated hatred in such books as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Brazilian writer Paulo Freire.

"To create a sense of victimhood and inflame racial passions like that ... I think it was completely appropriate for these issues to come to the surface and for us to deal with these issues," Huppenthal declared.

Critics of the program suggested that it should be made into an elective instead of a social-studies requirement, while proponents argued that making the class an elective would effectively destroy it by eliminating students' incentive to enroll in it. Sean Arce, director of Mexican American Studies, stated, "Students, particularly Latino students who have traditionally struggled to graduate, will not take the additional courses and double up for an additional history class."

Mark Stegeman, the board president seeking to make the changes, asserted, "There's been a sense in the district that the Mexican American Studies program is flawless, and despite its positive qualities, this rhetoric doesn't serve the district well. Almost all of our programs have some room for improvement."

Huppenthal ordered that the school district receive a 10-percent cut from its state checks each month until it complies with the demands of the DOE to change the curriculum of its ethnic studies program. If it fails to do so, it will have lost \$14 million by June 30. That penalty is retroactive — a decision defended by Huppenthal because he first declared the program to be in violation of the law last summer.

Likewise, Loretta Hunnicutt, a member of the organization Tucsonans United for Sound Districts and a leading opponent of the program, observed, "The classes do create resentment and do politicize children's education, and that's inappropriate."

The program's defenders have argued that instead, it encourages Latino students to excel and to understand classic subjects from the perspective of Hispanics.

Two weeks ago, Administrative Law Judge Lewis Kowal upheld Huppenthal's decision on the program, asserting that the Tucson district had violated the law with the program.

Huppenthal is particularly angered because he contends the district had ample opportunity to address the issue, as he has criticized the program for years. "The district hasn't dealt with the issue," he pointed out, adding, "The problems are so deep and so wide, it would be almost impossible to cure the



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program.”

The ethnic studies program came about as a result of legal issues with segregation. The *Tucson Citizen* explains:

It was in large part borne of the district’s effort to fulfill court settlements of two segregation cases that were filed against it in the 1970s.

A judge then required the district to begin several years of improvements to end segregation and mistreatment of minority students.

The district, where more than 60 percent of the students are Latino, was released in 2010 from court monitoring in that case after a judge approved its final plan to end segregation. Ethnic-studies courses were included in that plan.

Supporters of the program have attempted to defend the need for the program by asserting that the students who have taken the courses are performing better in school, though there is no data to support such a claim. In fact, the school has a record of low performance in all the major subjects.

Still, when asked if the Arizona Department of Education will take control of the district to improve performance, Huppenthal replied that the state prefers local control. He commented, “We have high hopes for folks like [Tucson Superintendent] John Pedicone.”

Tuesday, the school board will discuss the future of the program, though it is unclear what direction it will take to address the issue.

Still, a number of Mexican-American studies advocates are now suing Huppenthal in federal court, asking a federal judge to stop the penalties from taking effect. “We’re waiting for a decision,” said Richard Martinez, an attorney for the advocates. “If there were ever circumstances that warranted a preliminary injunction, this is it.”

That lawsuit was filed in 2010, and the case is pending.

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