



ARISE

Organizational Testimony in Favor of House Bill 5836

The Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education Justice (ARISE) stands in full support of House Bill 5836, which proposes to establish a statewide Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.

ARISE was founded, by and for Southeast Asian refugees, because our histories—our parents' stories of war, survival, displacement, and resilience—were never taught in our classrooms. The silence around our cultural knowledge and political realities caused generations of students to feel invisible in their own schools. We know firsthand what happens when curriculum erases our Black, Indigenous, and other people of color: young people internalize that erasure. House Bill 5836 is a necessary intervention to end that cycle.

In partnership with OurSchoolsPWD, ARISE youth leaders co-led a research study to analyze the impact of Ethnic Studies on BIPOC high school students in Rhode Island's largest urban district. The results are clear. Students who participated in Ethnic Studies showed significant growth in their ability to name and analyze systems of racism, reported a greater desire to learn, and felt more connected to support systems and community. They shared that they finally saw their experiences reflected in what they were learning—and that alone was transformative.

Our research found six key outcomes of Ethnic Studies engagement:

- Cultivates students' ability to identify racist systems
- Increases student desire to learn
- Enhances access to support systems
- Improves understanding of social issues
- Equips students express feelings of liberation
- Equip students to recognize the value of diverse perspectives

These are not just academic outcomes—they are outcomes tied to healing, identity, and power. When we teach students their full histories, we equip them with the tools to thrive.

Furthermore, national research echoes our local findings. A 2021 evaluation of the San Francisco Unified School District revealed that 9th-grade enrollment in Ethnic Studies significantly increased attendance, GPA, and high school graduation rates, as well as the likelihood of college enrollment.

House Bill 5836 doesn't stop at the classroom. It establishes a student-led leadership council, encourages partnerships with community-based organizations like ARISE for curriculum development and teacher training, and calls for diverse educator pipelines. These are precisely the structural changes we need to ensure Ethnic Studies is implemented with integrity and impact.

We urge you to pass this bill—not only because it responds to a powerful youth-led movement but because it offers a vision for what education should be: a place where every student sees themselves reflected, affirmed, and empowered.

Thank you for your time and commitment to building schools that honor the full stories of our communities.