

04/23/2025

To: Rhode Island House Committee on Education

From: Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)

RE: H5836 - RELATING TO EDUCATION -- CURRICULUM

Testimony in Strong Support of H5836 – Ethnic Studies in Rhode Island High Schools

Submitted by Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)

Greetings Chairperson McNamara and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of *Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)* and the families we represent, we submit this testimony in strong support of H5836, legislation that would mandate a yearlong Ethnic Studies course in every Rhode Island high school, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.

As a grassroots, parent-led organization committed to dismantling systemic barriers in education and advancing racial equity, we believe this bill is not only timely, it is essential. Families across the state have long demanded that our schools reflect the full truth of our history and foster a sense of belonging and pride for all students, especially those from communities that have been historically excluded and misrepresented in traditional curricula.

H5836 responds to that call. It would:

- Make Ethnic Studies a core social studies credit and graduation requirement by the Class of 2030, ensuring every student is exposed to histories and narratives too often erased from textbooks and classrooms.
- Prioritize the teaching of Native American, Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Arab American, and Armenian histories, along with a deeper analysis of systems of power and race.
- Create space for youth leadership and community partnership through a student-led Ethnic Studies Leadership Council and collaborations with grassroots organizations.
- Require a student-led civics project, anchoring history education in action, voice, and relevance to students' lives.
- Strengthen educator diversity pipelines, ensuring this curriculum is delivered by professionals who reflect and understand the communities they serve.

The research is clear: ethnic studies improves academic engagement, graduation rates, and critical thinking skills. It increases students' connection to school, boosts their understanding of social issues, and validates the identities of students who have long been left out of the narrative.

But beyond the data, parents support H5836 because we are raising children who deserve to see themselves, accurately and affirmatively, in the curriculum. We are raising children who deserve to learn the full truth about this country's past and present, so they are equipped to shape its future. We are raising children who are tired of hearing that their histories are "too political" or "controversial." Our children are not controversial. Their stories are not optional.

This bill represents more than a policy change, it represents a commitment to justice, truth, and the power of education to transform lives.

We urge the Committee to pass H5836 without delay. Our children deserve an education that honors their histories, uplifts their identities, and prepares them to lead.

Sincerely,
Ramona Santos Torres
Executive Director
Parents Leading for Educational Equity