

Project UNITE: UNderstanding Identity Through Education

A collaboration between Minneapolis Public Schools and the University of Minnesota



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“We are developmental psychologists who do research to understand how young people thrive in multicultural societies, resist systems of oppression, and connect with their heritage. We are especially interested in how people from diverse backgrounds think, feel, and learn about their ethnic-racial identities.”

Learn more about our work here:

<https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/>

INSTITUTE OF
Child Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Culture and Family
Life Lab

Why did we do Project UNITE?

Minneapolis Public Schools are *leading the nation* in requiring Ethnic Studies classes to graduate.

We wanted to:

- 1) Understand student experiences
- 2) Use student feedback to improve the course
- 3) Help other districts around the country implement effective programs

MINNEAPOLIS

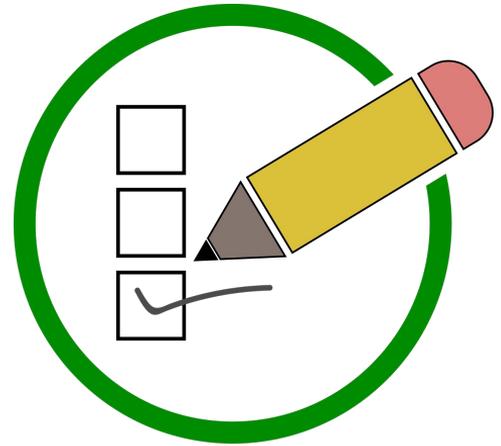
Minneapolis adds ethnic studies to high school graduation requirements

2025 graduates will need course credits exploring cultural identity, history.

By **Mara Klecker** Star Tribune | NOVEMBER 27, 2020 — 6:37PM

What did we do in Project UNITE?

- 590 students used surveys to tell us how they are thinking about their own **ethnic identity**, how they feel about **diversity and multicultural societies**, and other things going on in their lives.
- We **compared** survey responses from students taking ethnic studies and students taking a different social studies course (government, human geography, etc). This told us **how the ethnic studies course affected students!**



What did students experience in Ethnic Studies classes?

Students answered this prompt: “This class makes me feel _____, because _____.”

- Most students felt pleasant emotions like feeling **engaged, educated, reflective**, and **proud of their identity** (59.5% of students)
- Some students felt **inspired** or **anxious to change injustice in the world** (6.5%)
- Others felt the class was fine or typical (23%)
- Some felt disengaged or bored (10%), especially if they’d already learned a bit about the topics before

We all have different experiences! **How can you make the most of your time in the class?**

What did students experience in Ethnic Studies classes?

At the end of the ethnic studies class, students said: **I feel . . .**

. . . “more **informed** about different things going on in our world” (*Black female*)

. . . “**good** about myself because I **learned more about my identity**” (*Latino male*)

. . . “**inspired** to make positive change in the world” (*White female*)

. . . “more **knowledgeable** about other racial groups.” (*Asian female*)



Students' reflect on their identities and society in Ethnic Studies!

Compared to taking a different social studies class, **taking an ethnic studies class . . .**

- ★ Helped students learn more about their **own ethnic-racial identities**
 - Research shows having a strong ethnic-racial identity increases resilience to discrimination and helps people thrive in multicultural societies
- ★ Increased students' interest in learning about **other students' cultures**
- ★ Increased students' **engagement in their communities** through joining clubs, signing petitions, talking about social issues, and going to protests
- ★ Increased students' **well-being and sense that their life matters**
- ★ Increased **grades** in other classes for students with middle school GPA <2.0

We would love to hear from you!

Email cfl-lab@umn.edu (Sarah Gillespie) with any questions or comments!

Follow project updates here: <http://tinyurl.com/cflunite>



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**We are so grateful to
teachers and students
who gave their time to
participate in this
project!**