

February 22, 2023

Senate Education Policy Committee
C/O Committee Administrator Danna Elling

Re: Courses as Graduation Requirements



Dear Chair Cwodzinski and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) we would like to share some important concerns about bills which require credit in civics, personal finance and Ethnic Studies in either the 11th or 12th grade. We have testified in the past and wanted to place our concerns on the record again this session.

MN High school students have 36 months to complete the required 21.5 credits, plus locally determined credit for phy-ed and health to graduate. Those required credits don't allow a lot of room for the classes students have worked so hard to master and want to continue throughout high school. There have been several bills seeking a course for credit, and while the topics are all important, looking at it from a 30,000 foot view, it puts students and families, especially within their senior year, in a position where they won't be able to take courses of choice, like CTE courses, or higher level language, math or science courses. Courses that could impact a career or post-secondary decision as well.

Civics currently exists within our school's curriculum. Students begin the study of civics in grades 7 and 8, understanding Democratic government depends on informed and engaged citizens who exhibit civic skills and values, practice civic discourse, vote and participate in elections, apply inquiry and analysis skills and take action to solve problems and shape public policy. It continues in depth in grades 9-12.

Personal finance currently exists within our school's curriculum and many schools do offer a separate class in personal finance. The new social studies standards include personal finance, which will apply economic concepts and models to develop individual and collective financial goals and strategies for achieving these goals, taking into consideration historical and contemporary conditions that either inhibit or advance the creation of individual and generational wealth.¹

Districts, such as Minneapolis, St. Paul and Rochester, have adopted Ethnic Studies coursework. Other districts are also following and adopting Ethnic Studies as a course requirement for graduation or an elective. Once again, the proposed social studies standards include:

23. Identity:

¹ Minnesota Department of Education - 021 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies (Commissioner Approved Draft)

Analyze the ways power and language construct the social identities of race, religion, geography, ethnicity and gender. Apply these understandings to one's own social identities and other groups living in Minnesota, centering those whose stories and histories have been marginalized, erased or ignored.

24. Resistance: Describe how individuals and communities have fought for freedom and liberation against systemic and coordinated exercises of power locally and globally. Identify strategies or times that have resulted in lasting change. Organize with others to engage in activities that could further the rights and dignity of all.

25. Ways of Knowing/Methodologies:

Use ethnic and Indigenous studies methods and sources in order to understand the roots of contemporary systems of oppression and apply lessons from the past in order to eliminate historical and contemporary injustices.²

It's always important to point out that implementing new curriculum is very costly and it is important that school districts can implement any changes in the next revision cycle.

Our organizations support and encourage all these areas of study for students in their academic years and in preparation for their careers through the existing locally developed process and implementation.

We appreciate your commitment to strengthening our students' education. However, our members believe curriculum decisions are best made at the local level by locally elected school boards working with their staff, students, parents and community. Our members believe that requiring any, much less multiple, courses for credit in 11th or 12th grade is too prescriptive and would create significant scheduling challenges and limit academic opportunities for high school students. Choice is important to our families. Accordingly, we respectfully oppose these bills in their current form.

² 2021 Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies (Commissioner Approved Draft)