

MDE's Ethnic Studies Framework for Implementation



Summary

The Walz administration and the Minnesota Legislature have entrenched an extremist ideology known as “Liberated Ethnic Studies” in our state’s K-12 public school system. Ethnic Studies will teach students to view the world through the lens of race, power and “resistance,” in every grade and subject.

- MDE has relied on political activists to lead this initiative since its inception. Center of the American Experiment has sounded the alarm since Gov. Tim Walz launched it with his “Due North” plan in 2020.

Now Ethnic Studies is about to become a reality in K-12 classrooms. In September 2024, MDE’s “Ethnic Studies Working Group” of hand-picked advisors completed its Framework for statewide implementation, which recommends course guidelines, teacher training and instructional resources.

- But MDE refused to release the Framework,

despite earlier promises to do so. Center of the American Experiment had to initiate a lawsuit to obtain it.

The Framework’s content explains MDE’s reluctance:

The document lays out a multi-faceted ground plan to transform our schools’ mission from providing students with academic knowledge and skills to creating political activists.

- It reflects the agenda of the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition, whose mission is to “center” K-12 public school instruction on groups “erased from mainstream curricula due to persistent racism, patriarchy [and] linguistic imperialism.”
- The Coalition’s founding organizer, Brian Lozenski—a primary author of the Framework—has called in an interview for the “overthrow” of the U.S. government. [See Exhibit 1]

MDE has indicated to the Center that it doesn’t intend

to adopt the Framework in its current form, but it provided no information about modifications or a timeline.

In fact, the Framework is the logical outcome of the legal and regulatory infrastructure that now undergirds Ethnic Studies in our state. MDE and the bill authors knowingly chose political activists to design that infrastructure and lead the initiative. The new Ethnic Studies regime will impose a monumental, costly and self-destructive burden on our state’s overstressed public schools, at a time when a majority of Minnesota students can’t read or do math at grade level.

The Legislature must make rolling back the academic standards and laws that undergird Ethnic Studies a top priority in its 2025 session.

Overview of the Framework

The Walz administration sold Ethnic Studies to Minnesota citizens as a vehicle to promote unity and racial understanding. But with the **62-page Framework, the mask is off!**¹

The Framework sets out a blueprint for reframing public education in four dramatic ways:

1. It shifts the mission of public education from academic instruction to political activism.
2. It pressures teachers to conform their personal identity and beliefs to Ethnic Studies ideology; become “anti-racist advocates”; and cede authority in the classroom to students as “co-creators of knowledge.”
3. It calls on all public schools to make building Ethnic Studies infrastructure and resources a top priority that takes precedence over other educational needs.

MDE and the bill authors knowingly chose political activists to design that infrastructure and lead the initiative.

4. It undermines local control of public schools, shifting decision-making power from elected school board members to MDE, students and “racialized” community advocacy groups.

These four themes are summarized below.

1. Mission shift to political activism

Ethnic Studies does not teach “multiculturalism” or highlight demographic groups’ “contributions.” (pp. 9, 15) Its goal is to prepare students to become political “change agents” who transform their communities through “activism and resistance,” according to the Framework. (pp. 7-8, 19)

To achieve this, the new Ethnic Studies regime will refocus K-12 instruction on “a power analysis of race” and how it produces “oppression and constructs identity.” (pp. 6, 8) [emphasis added]

- Ethnic Studies’ “core” tenets are listed below, and new curricula must teach them all to fulfill Ethnic Studies requirements. (pp. 6, 8, 18, 35, 49)
 - Discussion of colonialism and empire building
 - Intersectionality and Identity (relationship to whiteness)
 - Indigeneity
 - Histories of activism and resistance, and
 - Reclaiming erased histories and centering of knowledge production by racialized groups
- **Integrating Ethnic Studies into existing K-12 curricula will require a “fundamental shift”** in the way these courses are taught, according to the Framework. (p. 14)
- The nearby graphic illustrates how Ethnic Studies will reframe Minnesota K-12 education. (p. 9)

¹ <https://files.americanexperiment.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ESWG-Deliverable-Draft.pdf?v=1740170483>

A. How Ethnic Studies is embedded in K-12 education

Minnesota policymakers have imposed Ethnic Studies on Minnesota schools via K-12 academic standards and far-reaching legislation.

• Academic standards

MDE adopted new statewide K-12 Social Studies standards in 2024. These standards:

- Embed Ethnic Studies concepts and ideology throughout the four core Social Studies disciplines of history, geography, economics, and citizenship and government, and
- Add Ethnic Studies as a “fifth strand,” with its own K-12 standards.

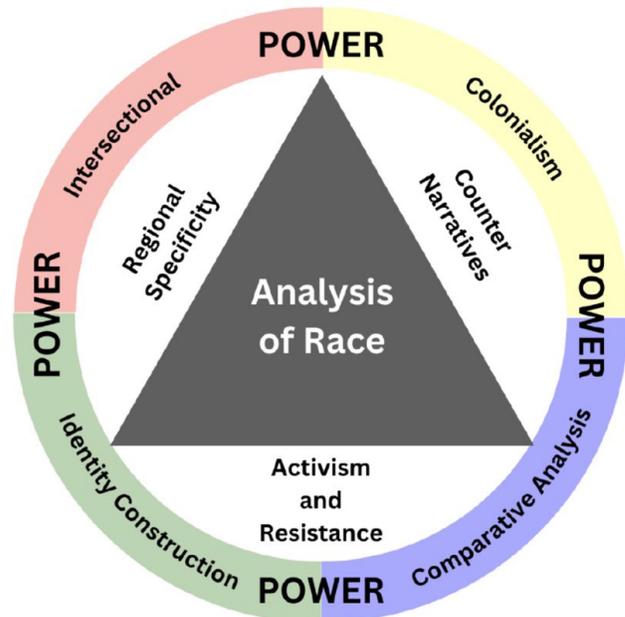
Schools must implement the new standards by the 2026-27 school year.

• Legislation

The legislature enacted a far-reaching Ethnic Studies law (Session Laws 2023-Chapter 55) in 2023. This law:

- Requires MDE to embed Ethnic Studies ideology in K-12 standards for math, science, language arts, arts and physical education as these come due for revision, and
 - Requires high schools to offer an Ethnic Studies course by 2026-27 and to begin Ethnic Studies instruction in K-8 by 2027-28.
- Policymakers have also hardwired Ethnic Studies concepts and ideology into state teaching standards, teacher licensing requirements (including cultural competency, indigenous learning, etc.), and fundamental school mechanics. (p. 19)

Illustration of Ethnic Studies



Source: Ethnic Studies Working Group Recommendation Draft, October 2024

B. Ethnic Studies’ architects

A political advocacy organization called the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition has played a central role in constructing our state’s new Ethnic Studies regime.

In fact, the Coalition was founded for this purpose in 2019 by another extremist group, Education for Liberation MN, according to EdLib MN’s website.

The Coalition’s influence was decisive at every step:

- Coalition members and allies dominated MDE’s Social Studies Standards drafting committee in 2020-22. (p. 7)

- The Coalition led the lobbying campaign for the Ethnic Studies legislation in 2023. (Brian Lozenski served as chief testifier for the bill.) (p. 7)
- In 2024, Coalition members and allies dominated the MDE Working Group that wrote the Framework for statewide implementation. (The legislature mandated that the group’s members be selected with “input” from the Coalition.) As noted, Lozenski was a primary author of the Framework. [See Exhibit 2]

C. Ethnic Studies will politicize student learning

The Framework recommends that teachers use skewed, ideologically freighted Ethnic Studies K-12 curricula, designed to enlist vulnerable children behind an extremist political agenda.

These materials portray Minnesota as Alabama in the 1930s and **teach nothing about America’s Civil Rights laws.**

- **Grades K-2** (pp. 36-38)
 - Text: *My Powerful Hair*.
 - Using this book, the teacher leads children in a discussion of discrimination based on “racialized hair texture and styles”—comparing hair-cutting practices of “Indigenous and Black communities” (dreadlocks and Indian boarding schools).
 - Students partner with a local indigenous organization to “map the Indigenous community pre/post colonialism.”
- **Grades 3-5** (pp. 38-42)
 - Students study “solidarity movements like the Third World Liberation Front and the Delano grape strike.”

- The teacher asks questions like: “What is power?”; “Who holds it?”; How do “institutions, like schools, oppress groups based on race?”; and “How do we redistribute power to create equitable...ecosystems?”
- Students take “pictures of how they feel about school” and express “what it’s like to be racialized in school.”
- They study “the need for organizing” in “a racialized society” and meet regularly with local activist groups “to build and sustain relationships.”
- They learn about “contemporary protest dancing” and create “their own original dances of resistance.”

- **Grades 6-8** (pp. 42-46)

- Text: *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You, A Remix*, by Ibram X. Kendi.
- Students study how race is “socially constructed,” using resources like “How Did Jews Become White Folks?”
- They “explore George Floyd Square” and “drive around the Twin Cities area to look at the murals and artistic pieces combatting racism.” (“Experiential learning.”)
- They “learn about Black Power as resistance”; “explore the ‘Mapping Prejudice’ website”; and study racial covenants and “how different groups fought against” them.

- **Grades 9-12** (pp. 46-47)

- Students study lynchings in Duluth in 1920 and take a field trip to a memorial site there.

- **Ways of knowing** (pp. 19-20)

Instruction in “ways of knowing” of “racialized” communities is “crucial for successful Ethnic Studies implementation,” according to the Framework.

- One such “way of knowing”—an Aztec/Mayan system called “In Lakesh”—illustrates the risks of Ethnic Studies’ focus on tribalized “religion and spirituality.”
- In 2021, California’s Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum included “In Lak Ech” (sic). The curriculum **encouraged teachers to lead students in indigenous chants and affirmations that invoked Aztec gods.**
- The chant culminated in the “In Lak Ech affirmation”: Students first plead for “liberation, transformation, [and] decolonization,” and then shout “Panche beh! Panche beh!” in a quest for ultimate “critical consciousness.”
- The affirmation was dropped in 2022, after California plaintiffs filed suit on grounds that it violated church-state separation. (The state paid plaintiffs \$100,000 in attorneys’ fees.)

2. Ethnic Studies will transform teachers’ role

In Minnesota’s new Ethnic Studies regime, teachers’ role will change as radically as the content of student instruction, according to the Framework.

Teachers will be pressured to adopt Ethnic Studies ideology as a condition of employment, and classroom dynamics will shift dramatically.

A. Reeducation of teachers

- Prior to Ethnic Studies implementation, K-12 teachers—regardless of field—must “undergo” “professional development” (PD) that “fosters a paradigm shift,” according to the Framework. (pp. 16, 18)
- **All must participate** in this “transformative” PD: not only teachers, but school counselors, paraprofessionals, special ed and other support personnel, school administrators, and “building and district leadership,” according to the Framework. (pp. 16,

18, 25, 29) Teachers in small or rural schools are not exempt. (p. 16)

- Only in this way can “educators be adequately prepared to effectively implement Ethnic Studies,” the Framework declares. (p. 18)

i) Content of professional development

Mandatory PD will focus on the following topics, with the goal of inducing teachers to adopt an identity and beliefs that conform to the new state-endorsed ideology.

• Mission of education

- First, school personnel must “re-evaluat[e] their understanding of the purpose of education,” the Framework states. (p. 18)
- They will be pressured to embrace Ethnic Studies’ “liberatory” vision of public education’s mission as race-and-power analysis, “intersectional” identity formation, and the importance of promoting student-led radical social change.

• Personal identity

- Next, teachers will be encouraged to cultivate the “identity” of “anti-racist advocate,” and learn to model “racial consciousness and reflection.” (pp. 19, 28-29)
- The goal is to answer the question: “How does Ethnic Studies instruction and support allow me to form an emerging identity as an anti-racist individual and advocate?” (p. 29)

• Critical consciousness and worldview

- Finally, PD will instruct teachers in Ethnic Studies’ core tenets.
- BIPOC “activism and resistance” must be given centrality, according to the Framework. (p. 18) Topics will range from “histories of resistance to injustice” (p. 19); to “anti-colonial and anti-racist movements” (p.

20); “embedding counternarratives” (p. 24); “uncovering settler grammars in curriculum” (p. 23); and “critical pedagogy of place, land and water-based pedagogy.”(p. 19)

ii) Teacher self-assessments

A primary tool in Ethnic Studies reeducation will be “teacher self-assessments.”

Framework-endorsed “self-assessments” use intrusive, cult-like techniques to pressure teachers to sacrifice their individuality and embrace state-endorsed group-think. For example, they instruct teachers to:

- “Continuously reflect on my identities and my relationships to structure and power,” (p. 28) and
- “Recognize the ways white supremacy shows up in my everyday life (e.g., at home...” and in school “leadership”) and develop “the tools to challenge white supremacy” in order to become an advocate for the “liberation” of “marginalized communities.” (pp. 20, 29)

B. Teachers must cede power to students

Ethnic Studies’ fundamental goal is to equip students to become political “change agents” in the larger society. (pp. 19, 32, 49)

- For this reason, it recenters schooling around “student voices and choices,” requiring teachers to cede power and authority in the classroom to students. (pp. 32, 51)
 - Ethnic Studies views students as “co-creators” of knowledge. They are directly engaged in choosing what and how they learn, and “use their own inherent genius to create pathways to learning.” (pp. 31-32)
 - “Co-creation of this kind is a huge piece of Ethnic Studies,” according to the Framework. (p. 32)

- Students will be aided in this by local BIPOC activist groups, with which they build relationships starting in kindergarten. (pp. 19, 34-36, 38)

- **This classroom power shift will also require teachers to change the way they evaluate student performance.**

Ethnic Studies calls for “a student-centered approach to success, as defined by the students and their families.” (pp. 18, 20)

- The Framework recommends that—to prepare teachers for this momentous shift in classroom dynamics—self-assessments pose the following questions:

- **“How do I decenter my voice in the classroom and place students/community voices at the forefront?”** (p. 30)
- “Am I creating opportunities for Black, Indigenous and racialized youth...and their communities to hold me accountable for engaging Ethnic Studies authentically?” (p. 29)
- “How am I disrupting the binary between teacher and student and instead working to co-construct knowledge in my classroom?” (p. 30)
- “How is my teaching providing the content” for “racialized students to address community concerns, as defined by them?” (p. 30)

Minnesota schools already find it difficult to attract and retain good teachers, given escalating student misconduct and disorder. The new Ethnic Studies regime’s plan to require personal identity change and “shift power” to students appears likely to increase the problem.

3. Ethnic Studies becomes our schools’ top priority

The Framework seeks to make Ethnic Studies a centerpiece of public education. (pp. 7, 12-15)

- It recommends that “schools/districts/charters” adopt a “five-year vision/strategic plan for Ethnic Studies,” including the following: (p. 13)
 - A fully staffed Ethnic Studies department to implement and grow Ethnic Studies. (pp. 12, 14, 16)
 - Ethnic Studies budget allocations increase from year to year. (p. 14)
- Ethnic Studies classes “receive schedule and logistical priority.” (p. 12)
 - Schools create “multiple opportunities” for students to “explore Ethnic Studies across all grade levels,” to “maximize” their “exposure.” (p. 11)
 - These include integrative and “racialized group”-focused courses, including STEM and middle and high school courses, with “advanced” options. (pp. 10-11, 14-15)
 - Examples: “Race and Identity,” “Art and Activism,” “Activism and Resistance in the US.”
- Comprehensive PD for all educators, with “multiple opportunities” to “participate in local and national Ethnic Studies PD.” (p. 13)
- Districts and charters may need to change school hiring practices to “ensure” elementary “teachers have the knowledge and expertise to do this work effectively.” (pp. 10, 16)
 - Smaller districts and charters must provide support for every teacher, regardless of field, to bring Ethnic Studies’ “race and power” analysis into his or her class. (p. 16)

4. Ethnic Studies will undermine local control of public schools

The Framework uses a variety of vehicles to restrict school boards’ autonomy and flexibility in Ethnic Studies implementation and ensure radical content.

• Top-down controls:

- A detailed “District and Charter Self-Assessment” tool that ensures Ethnic Studies saturation, including “annual audit of Ethnic Studies implementation.” (pp. 3, 11-14)
- Claim that schools must conform to Ethnic Studies’ “spirit,” not standards’ “technical criteria.” (pp. 10-11, 31)
- Claim that Ethnic Studies instruction must teach all Ethnic Studies “core tenets” to fulfill academic requirements. (p. 35)
- Restriction of state grant funds to Ethnic Studies projects that support “Framework implementation” and teach all “core” Ethnic Studies tenets. (pp. 48-59)
- Recommendation that schools conduct “racial equity audits” to “ensure Ethnic Studies” is “supported and implemented authentically and expansively.” (p. 30)

• Pressure from activists (grassroots):

- Shifts decision-making power over curricula to students, parents and local BIPOC activists. (pp. 14, 30)
- Pressures schools to form “partnerships” with political advocacy groups to create teacher PD and instructional materials. (pp. 19, 34-35)
- Gives power to students and “community members” to ensure implementation remains “accountable” to the “movements” at the center of “Ethnic Studies praxis.” (p. 30)

The Framework creates a full-employment plan for Minnesota’s booming Ethnic Studies industry

Minnesota’s new Ethnic Studies regime guarantees a permanent and expanding demand for services.

- The Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition and its allies are likely to benefit both professionally and personally. **The scheme creates numerous opportunities for self-dealing.**
- “Partnerships” with local “racialized” advocacy organizations—like the Coalition itself—“are at the heart of Ethnic Studies,” in the Framework’s words. (pp. 18-20, 31)
- Community activists’ involvement is vital to the creation of both teacher PD and classroom materials. (pp. 8, 19, 25)

The Framework endorses organizations like the following for partnership and consulting work. (pp. 21-26)

Minnesota organizations

- **The Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition.**
 - The Coalition is made up of 20 or so local advocacy organizations.
 - The Framework recommends one by name: Education Evolving. (p. 21) This group has described American history as a shameful tale of “systemic, economic, political and moral inequity.”
- **The Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender and Sexuality Studies (RIDGS)** at the University of Minnesota.
 - RIDGS is an amalgam of “oppression studies” departments whose mission is to “challenge systems of power and inequality” and “imagine social transformation.”
 - RIDGS faculty served on both MDE’s Social Studies Standards Committee and the MDE Working Group that wrote the Framework.

- RIDGS is now promoting its own Ethnic Studies lesson plans to Minnesota schools via Education Minnesota, the teachers’ union.
- RIDGS has obtained public funding to build a comprehensive “K-12 Ethnic Studies Initiative”—independent of MDE’s own—upon the legal and regulatory infrastructure our policy-makers have created.²

- **The Minnesota Education Equity Partnership (MNEEP).**

- MNEEP’s director is Carlos Mariani, a former DFL legislator who once chaired the House Education Policy Committee.

- **Black Lives Matter MN.**

National organizations

For professional development:

- **Education for Liberation Network.**

- The EdLib Network is the parent organization of the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition. Brian Lozenski—the Coalition’s founder and organizer—is an EdLib Network board member.
- EdLib’s Minnesota chapter’s mission is to be “a political force” in our state to “contend with the status quo of colonial education that prioritizes Eurocentric curricula” and “predominantly white educators and administrators.”

- **The Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMC).**

- The California-based LESMC—which promotes an extremist K-12 curriculum—has declared its support for political revolution:

2 <https://www.americanexperiment.org/magazine/article/liberating-students-from-education>

“System changes occur when people unite, mobilize and organize in coordinated resistance to disrupt and dismantle inequitable systems.”

Ethnic Studies consulting can be lucrative.

- **The people who shape the policies and lobby for the laws often go on to profit from them.**
 - The Framework lays the groundwork for this, recommending state grants for school collaborations with advocacy organizations, and/or
 - Funding for Ethnic Studies-related nonprofits to create PD and instructional materials. (p. 52)

Conclusion

Minnesota policymakers have entrenched Ethnic Studies throughout our K-12 education system, in every grade and subject. The structure they have put in place is the product of political advocacy groups intent on re-making our schools and our society—groups that MDE and bill authors knowingly chose to lead the initiative.

The Framework for implementation reviewed here is the logical—and inevitable—result. It reveals the authoritarian agenda that drives the entire project.

Is MDE now attempting to back away from what it has done? Its refusal to release the Framework to the public suggests the answer is yes.

MDE may try to tweak the Framework, likely on grounds that it doesn't align with the department's new Social Studies standards. But the Walz administration and bill authors share its ideology, though they may now find the Working Group's raw, unbridled expression of it a political liability.

In fact, the administration proposed the statutory definition of Liberated Ethnic Studies, bill authors sold it as moral cultural awareness, and MDE staff laced identitarian ideology throughout administrative rules. As a

result, radical Ethnic Studies ideology is now poised to become a reality in K-12 classrooms across our state.

Whatever MDE does, extremist organizations like the U of M's Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender and Sexuality Studies will build on the new Ethnic Studies structure and market their own curricula and training to our state's schools.

The only way to avoid this looming disaster is to repeal the academic standards and laws that created it. ★

Katherine Kersten is a senior policy fellow at the Center of the American Experiment.

Appendix

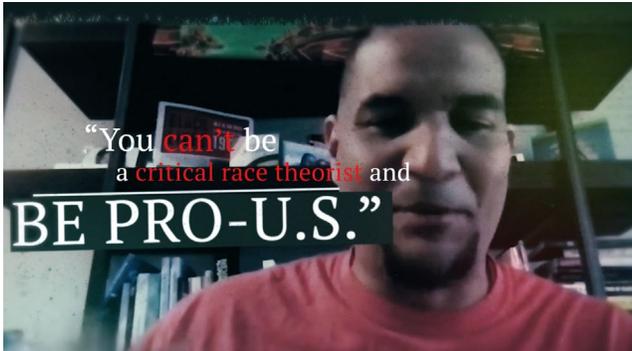


Exhibit 1: Brian Lozenski's comments during an online discussion include saying, "So if the nation-state as constructed is irreversibly racist, then it must be done with, it must be overthrown, right. [Critical race theory] is about overthrow. It's insurgent. ... You can't be a critical race theorist and be pro-U.S. ... It is an anti-state theory that says the United States needs to be deconstructed, period."

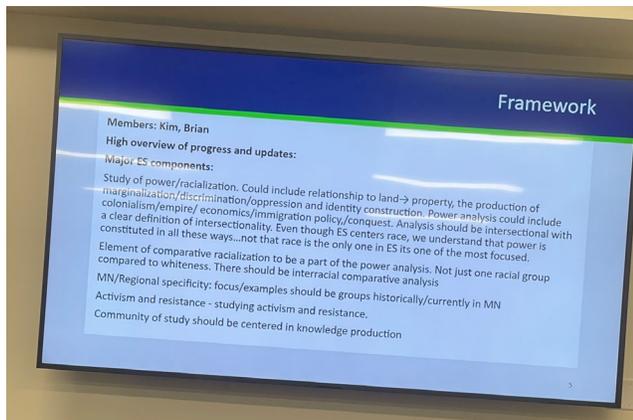


Exhibit 2: PowerPoint slide from an Ethnic Studies Working Group public meeting showing Brian Lozenski as one of two lead members on the Framework writing team; June 25, 2024

