

January 11, 2022 Board of Trustees Meeting
Public Comment for Item J.5 – Approve Ethnic Studies Course

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

My name is Jocelyn Alvarado, I am a senior at Paso Robles High School, this school year the board decided to give Ethnic Studies as an option as an elective. I wanted to learn more about culture including learning more about my culture's history. Last semester was the best semester I have ever had at PRHS and I do have to say that Ethnic Studies has played a huge role in the experiences I have gone through so far. I've learned so much and we are only half way through the school year. I connected the dots from things I've learned in my past social studies classes. Due to that my education and the curriculum has been so much more interesting, I see connections through everything now, I have seen how much and that has encouraged me to get more involved at school. I gained so many friends through Ethnic Studies, people who I have never talked to in my life are now some of my good friends. Ethnic Studies has impacted my life so much that I now want to major in it and hopefully teach it to future generations to come. I can say so much about the curriculum, but that's only a fraction of what the class truly is. Mr. Land and along with my peers have made a great, big, loving little family. I ask you to please make this course another approval for the upcoming school year and hopefully as a permanent course, if the board approves of this course I encourage all underclassmen to take this class. It is truly one of the many classes that I absolutely love, and that I will hold deeply in my heart forever.
Jocelyn Alvarado, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

This course has helped me understand so much more about cultures not included in other classes. At PRHS this course has helped me see the students and administrators in such a different way. Ethnic studies have shown me so much about my own culture that I didn't know about. My dad passed away almost 9 years ago and he was Native American. We studied a Native American Unit, and it brought back so many amazing memories. It showed me things that I was told and taught about when I was little but don't really remember. I hope this class continues as I think it is very beneficial to many kids as it will help them see outside of just our small town bubble. I think this class should be approved for permanent stay as it has helped so much and the class has become so close with each other and helped me so much! Thank you,
Lexi Keller, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

I have the privilege to be in Ethnic Studies surrounded by supportive peers, who I consider a family. I have the ability to critically think and be challenged, which has contributed to putting more effort into my school life and yearning to be more involved. I even notice my own family supporting me more by being in Ethnic Studies. I wish for every student to have a similar experience as me, because I have gained vital education that wasn't taught to me in previous classes, but something I had to learn on my own. Ethnic Studies gives me the learning tools to excel and a supportive community that is devoted to spreading equity, love, education, and support. I have never seen such a progressive class, in which each student has the ability to

flourish as an individual and together. Sharing the beauty of multicultural America is something I forever cherish and am grateful to be a part of. Allow each student of Paso Robles High School to create a space where they are celebrated and can be a part of the movement for union and progression.

Zoey Manninger, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic studies has created a safe space for many students, and I am one of the students that feels this is a safe space. I have never felt this much open-mindedness to others' thoughts. It not only teaches you how to listen to others thoughts, but how to express your own thoughts in a thoughtful manner. This class has taught me how to be more open with my thoughts and I have lost the fear I used to have of speaking about issues that matter to me.

Cristal Martinez, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic Studies has been the only class that has allowed me to open my mind beyond what's written in many California course lessons. We speak freely and express different opinions on what isn't spoken of in any other Social Studies classes I've had. Most of us in the class speak up for inclusion and celebration of all ethnicities. We provide events and posters with the help of some clubs on campus. We are more determined to achieve cultural acceptance than we have ever been before.

Francisco Anaya, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic Studies has placed a new, significant value on the voices of students and more specifically on their cultures and backgrounds. Creating a space where diversity is celebrated and all stories are told builds the confidence of every student. Learning about others evokes an utmost respect for the differences we hold dearly as humans, and the knowledge gained simply aids a better understanding. Personally, this class has made me not only be proud of who I am as a Salvadoreña, but excited to dismantle stereotypes and injustices that have posed as an obstacle to honoring other people and diverse individuals. To learn of all these other backgrounds, cultures and identities has only deepened my grasp of my identity and how to display it on our PRHS campus. The Hispanic Heritage Month lunch celebration did just that, and surprisingly it was the first time many Hispanic and/or Latino/a students felt seen.

Jenny Ayala, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic Studies has been such an important part of my education this year. It has helped me learn more about what I am learning or have learned in my other classes and helps me get a better

knowledge of those concepts. Our course has complemented the AP US History class I'm taking. It's really informative for me, learning so much more about those topics in Ethnic Studies than I'm able to in my history class. I feel that Ethnic Studies has greatly contributed to the cultural life at PRHS, and I think that so many people feel that way as well. Somewhat because of our class, there have been events that I don't think would have happened otherwise. I believe that this class is extremely important for the rest of the students at PRHS. To be able to learn about all sorts of things that we don't get to in other classes, it's something that everyone should have the opportunity to access.

Kelsey Hammond, Ethnic Studies Student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

I would describe my journey through Ethnic Studies as thrilling, enlightening, lively, and overall one of the best experiences of my high school career. As a departing senior this year, I see this class as one that unites students together in a subject that they will all fall in love with and leave the classroom every day wanting to learn more. We need more classes like this at PRHS but most importantly, Ethnic Studies needs to stay as a curriculum for future Bearcats to understand and be informed with history and opportunities to better see the world.

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

From knowing nothing or never hearing anything about the term "Ethnic Studies," I am now on my path to major in Ethnic/Chicana Studies in my future university. This course has inspired me to further my education in this subject and thanks to Mr. Land I see that Ethnic Studies has always been the hole I've been missing in my education. I feel like I can finally graduate knowing that I've learned, studied, and loved what I've wanted to learn in my four years at PRHS. In this class, we have created a safe space for all of us to feel welcome and appreciated. That is one reason this class should stay at the school. I've never seen myself more represented in a class curriculum that acknowledges other's cultures, history, and challenges perspectives that make learning feel inclusive. Students want to learn about topics that include themselves and not just about the history curriculum we've been taught for years. I have seen how students' faces light up or how the environment of the classroom feels the adrenaline when we are learning about a topic that a lot of us feel embraced in which is something I've never seen before. By allowing Ethnic Studies to stay as a course at PRHS, I believe that more students will be able to take pride and embody who they are and will add more culture to campus which is something I wished I had seen in my four years.

I've even seen tremendous growth in owning my own identity and being able to proudly say that I am Hispanic/Latina, indigenous, and Zapotec through the process of this class. Having the ability to say all these things was not always easy, but with support from the class and recognizing what makes me unique, I can confidently stand up for those who are still holding back.

Ethnic Studies has even been involved in several activities on campus that have brought more life and culture at PRHS. When we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month out in the quad, I was so

proud to see students who dance to the same music as me, enjoy the same food, and whose parents have gone through the same situations as mine. We were able to share a moment where for the first time a lot of us felt welcome and almost at home. With 51% of the student body being represented by Hispanics/Latinos, it was incredible to be able to finally have an opportunity to share our culture with others that we are immensely proud of.

Overall, Ethnic Studies is not simply a history class, but a new home to me and many of my classmates. By allowing this course to be permanently continued at PRHS, I deeply believe that the negative situations we are facing on campus will be able to be resolved in the future by having students understand and learn for the first time about other students' backgrounds. Moving onto our future generations, the time to comprehend and ask the hard questions is now: our high school experience. I am so glad and feel honored to be able to take Ethnic Studies as a high school senior and move on to my next journey in life knowing that I have learned and discussed topics that I would've never done if it wasn't for this insightful curriculum.

As a leader on campus being the Senior Class Secretary, Yearbook Editor-in-Chief, and Jazz N' Company Secretary, I strongly stand with permanently continuing this course where I see all genders, races, and cultures being accepted and welcome when we dive deeper into inclusive history. Being a part of several academic groups, clubs, and activities, I see every group being benefited by this course that teaches students how to dismantle racism, how to not discriminate against diverse groups of students, and have them double think about their bias towards other students.

I hope the board understands how important and necessary Ethnic Studies is to some students and how keeping this class will bring brighter days on campus filled with informed, proud, and unprejudiced Bearcats. Ethnic Studies needs to stay at PRHS.

Zaira Gomez, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic Studies isn't like any other class. As cheesy as it sounds we've all become a family. Taking this course has given me the opportunity to learn about the history that is not taught throughout our curriculum. I've also had the opportunity to explore my identity. I have not had the opportunity to understand what my identity is. The environment in this class has given me a safe space. A place where I am comfortable with who I am. I have come to the realization that I want to incorporate Ethnic Studies as a minor when attending a 4-year university. Being able to learn about the different types of traditions and cultures that my peers take part in has contributed a lot to the cultural life at PRHS. Ethnic Studies should be extended for another and at most permanently. I would love to see many more students learn about the history we don't learn through our curriculum but to get to know ourselves and who we are.

Ana Lopez, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethics Studies has allowed me to have a voice for myself and my community. Being in a high school that is 50% Latino, you would think I would feel like I fit in but the reality of it was that I never did. I used to feel unsure of expressing my culture and felt like if I talked about it I would be set aside from the other students or simply be judged. This class has taught me different; it has taught me to embrace who I am, what my identity is, and the things that make me, me despite what others may think of me. It has taught my peers and I to feel important and heard but most importantly this course has given me the ability to learn about the endless cultures there are and the importance of each one. I truly believe that this course will help other students at our school feel the same way and help them embrace who they are, where their parents come from, and allow them to learn about the fascinating things other cultures have to offer.

Xochitl Luis Lopez, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

Ethnic studies should continue at PRHS because they educate us on topics that if not for this class would not have been covered and it is also a place where we can feel included, safe and we can learn how to help minority groups through study and their history as well. We will be able to spread it around the world so that they can have what they deserve, which is equal opportunities regardless of their ethnic origin.

Nataly Medina-Hernandez, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

My name is Israel Pérez The Ethnic Studies course should continue being an option for Paso Robles high school students. This course has taught me so much education-wise and has taught me more about myself than I have ever learned in such a short period. The first thing we did in this class was on identities. I self-reflected and analyzed myself so much and grew from my initial position. Now I can say that I love myself and who I am. When in the beginning, I couldn't fathom the idea of self-love. This class has given me confidence, security, and love beyond what any English or history class has given me. I love that in this class, I am allowed to be me. With zero fear of being judged and criticized. It is one (of the very few) safe spaces on PRHS. Besides teaching me so much about myself. This class has given me lots of new knowledge. We learned about African-American contributions to the beautiful US. From the fashion we see. The music we hear. And the food we consume, we can see African-American traditions everywhere. We learned about how Native Americans are still here and ALIVE. We spoke of the sacred ceremonies, the traditional clothing, and the boarding schools. Ethnic Studies is a class that should continue being at PRHS. There will always be walls and obstacles. Ethnic Studies has taught me that you have to get uncomfortable to grow because growth will never come in comfort.

Israel Perez, Ethnic Studies student

Dear PRJUSD Board of Trustees,

At the beginning of ethnic studies, we focused on identity which was something I had never done in another class. This very short unit helped me learn so much about myself and what I represent. This class tends to always make me feel welcome, safe, accepted, and like I belong. I feel like all students should be able to experience something like this. And it's not just about learning more about yourself you also learn the true or whole story of some parts of history that you've most likely never heard before. This class has been so eye-opening especially while taking U.S history this year I hear the same topic except ethnic studies goes into a deeper depth of what really happened which helps a lot in classes. This class finds a way to make me feel passionate about learning in a way no other class has.

Tiffany Robles