

ED-RED Equity Ad Hoc Committee Work
Subcommittee on Black History Curriculum

Equity Ad Hoc Committee Background: Over the summer, ED-RED created an Equity Ad Hoc Committee as a forum for ED-RED member school districts to discuss the work, both past and present, that ED-RED districts are doing to close the equity gap. The goal of this committee was to use this work as a foundation for developing policy recommendations for future legislative negotiations around closing the equity gap and ensuring equitable educational access and opportunity to lead to improved outcomes for students of color.

Given the overwhelming response of members (over 40 school board members and administrators) that signed up for the Equity Ad Hoc committee, the group was divided into four subcommittees. Those subcommittees are: 1) Student Discipline and SRO/Police Presence on School Grounds; 2) Data Reporting (Discipline and Arrest Data); 3) Curriculum; and 4) Increasing BIPOC Candidates/Hiring/Retention. These subcommittees were tasked with delving deeply into past legislative proposals intended to increase educational equity, access and opportunity for students of color in our schools and to develop Guiding Principles for moving those proposals forward.

Below is an overview of the original legislation that gave rise to the Subcommittee on Black History Curriculum, along with the Guiding Principles and Recommendations to guide future negotiations on these issues.

Subcommittee on Black History Curriculum

HB 4954 Legislative Overview:

The Subcommittee on Black History Curriculum met to discuss and review Representative LaShawn Ford's (D-Chicago) original bill, HB 4954, introduced last spring that required additional specific events related to black history to be taught in schools. Representative Ford joined the Subcommittee at its initial meeting where he advised his intent to file new legislation, that he has since shared with us, that creates the "Reframing of History in Education Commission Act."

The "Reframing of History in Education Commission Act" establishes a commission to review the current/traditional course material and instruction that is being used to teach history in Illinois and develop new standards that schools may use as a guide to replace current history curriculum or develop their own. Under the Act, schools would be required to suspend the teaching of history instruction during the 2021-22 school year. By June 30, 2022, the State Superintendent shall issue instructional guidelines and standards based on the Commission's recommendations. Districts would then use those guidelines to begin teaching history again in the 2022-23 school year.

The committee met last month to review the bill proposal that Rep. LaShawn Ford has since filed related to the study of the teaching of history.

Guiding Principles

- It is imperative that the State and school districts collectively reassess how history/social sciences are taught in Illinois schools so that the perspectives and rich contributions of people of color and all marginalized groups are fully incorporated into the teaching of history/all social sciences.
- Member districts report that, because of the limitations and biases found in many textbooks, use of primary sources that represent multiple perspectives of historical events ought to become the norm.
- The components of the State Standards for Social Sciences must be considered an important component of this work.
- Many districts report having done extensive work improving how black history is taught in their districts and would be valuable resources in support of the work of the Commission

Recommendations

- The Commission, as set forth in the proposed bill, is composed of over 30 members, many of whom include opinion-based stakeholders. To consolidate the work of the Commission in a way that is manageable and fact-based, we recommend reorganizing the commission to be primarily composed of State and national teachers of history and the social sciences, scholars of history and social science, school administrators involved in curriculum development and other equity and education experts representing multiple perspectives and people of color. The Commission should hear from multiple stakeholders throughout the process (including families, students, parents and union/school management groups) and all stakeholders should have multiple opportunities (written and in-person) to voice feedback on draft proposals prior to the Commission approving a final set of recommendations to the State Superintendent. However, it is important for individuals doing this work on a daily basis to be the primary group responsible for developing recommendations.
- The Commission should not spend valuable time evaluating and determining the accuracy of materials and textbooks that districts have used in the past. Rather, it should be proactive and make recommendations on:
 - Meeting the Illinois Social Science Standards with fidelity where appropriate and making changes to them as needed;

- Developing an accessible and free/low-cost “library” of historical primary source materials that encompass the achievements and contributions of people of color and other marginalized groups, as well as a rubric for districts that want to evaluate whether to use other materials not included in that library;
- How to help students fully engage with those standards and primary source materials in an age-appropriate and meaningful way.
- How to ensure an inclusive social science curriculum in which the achievements of people of color and other marginalized groups are embedded in the curriculum throughout the year.
- ISBE should assess and modify any teacher social science certification issues, particularly at the high school level, that create a barrier to the teaching of an equitable and inclusive social science curriculum.
- Districts should be allowed to continue teaching history while the Commission completes its work so that there is not a gap in history instruction for students.