Talking Points: The Necessity of Mexican American Studies in High Schools

The Texas State Board of Education recently approved Mexican American Studies for high school credit. This comes at an opportune time considering the new graduation requirements set by House Bill 5, the increasing number of students seeking dual credit, and is culturally significant considering the changing demographics of, not just Texas, but the United States. Including Mexican American Studies is an opportunity too valuable to our students for school districts to forgo.

House Bill 5 has changed requirements for high school students in Texas. Under the new degree plan each student will choose an endorsement path to follow for graduation. These include career paths like Business and Industry, Public Services, and Arts and Humanities. For the students who choose Arts and Humanities, a total of five social studies credits are needed to graduate. Currently, most high schools only offer enough courses for four credits so another course is necessary for the Arts and Humanities endorsement. The newly approved Mexican American Studies course is ideal to fill the need school districts are facing for an additional social studies credit. This course would supplement preparation for STAAR testing, also necessary to graduate, by teaching students fundamental skills like writing, reading, and analytical and critical thinking.

The demand for dual courses is rising due to the want for college credits and for high school honors and graduation paths. Schools can better meet that demand through Mexican American Studies. Colleges, like South Texas College, offer courses in MAS and can offer them to high school students seeking dual enrollment credits. Dual credits are also necessary for high school honors and recognitions, and even graduation. Students who choose to follow the Multidisciplinary endorsement will need to have four credits in either AP, International Baccalaureate, or dual courses. Also under HB5, a student can earn a performance acknowledgement by having outstanding performance in a dual credit course. This requires the student to take 12 hours of dual credits with a GPA minimum of 3.0. Their diploma and transcript will include the outstanding performance recognition. School districts will need to increase the number of dual courses to allow their outstanding students to reach these requirements.

One of the most important reasons for high schools to adopt a Mexican American Studies course is to better prepare students for the future. The demographics of the United States are quickly changing which means we need to prepare our students for the world they will be living and working in. The Pew Research Hispanic Center has gathered data on the current and projected Hispanic population in the United States. The population projections for 2050 are drastically different from the percentages in 2005: 67% white; 14% Hispanic; 13% black, 5% Asian. The number for Hispanics in 2050 is projected to increase to a total of 29% while the white population is projected to drop to 47%. Other studies show a greater increase in the Hispanic population. As of 2011, 65% of all Hispanics originates from Mexico, greatly outnumbering those from all other Latin American countries. The demographics of the U.S. have significant implications. This will affect education, businesses, and politics. To give students knowledge about the majority of the Hispanic population will help them in their future work places as an employee and employer, understand the social and political changes that are likely to take place, and be a better citizen who is aware of the unique characteristics and needs of their nation and neighbors.

Victoria Rojas

Mission High School, member of the Rio Grande Valley Coalition for Border Studies and Mexican American Studies Curriculum Task Force