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Ethnic Studies Requirement for Indiana High Schools Signed Into Law *NAACP and IUPUI Advocacy Led to Bill's Passage After 4-Year Campaign*

INDIANAPOLIS — May 21, 2017 — Indiana high schools will be required to offer ethnic and racial studies as an elective course at least once every school year under Senate Enrolled Act 337, sponsored by Sen. Greg Taylor (D-Indianapolis) and signed into law by Gov. Eric Holcomb. The law will take effect July 1.

Greater Indianapolis NAACP Branch 3053 worked with African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian cultural education experts to successfully push for passage of the law, the result of four years of advocacy in the Indiana General Assembly.

The law requires that each school corporation, charter school and accredited nonpublic school “shall offer the study of ethnic and racial groups as a one semester elective course in its high school curriculum at least once every school year.” Schools may offer the course through a course access program administered by the department.

Chrystal Ratcliffe, president of NAACP of Greater Indianapolis, and education interim chair Garry Holland were invited to Gov. Holcomb’s ceremonial signing ceremony for SEA 337 on May 16. (See attached photo.)

“It started with the idea of requiring teaching of African American history in Indiana schools, and became a multi-cultural education requirement with the support of IUPUI professors and a diverse coalition,” Mrs. Ratcliffe said. “We are grateful to Senator Taylor for his persistence and leadership on this issue.”

Holland was instrumental in assembling experienced teams to meet with key legislators and to testify in support of the bill, including high school teachers, university professors and others knowledgeable about ethnic issues, including Kenny Long-Eagle of the Native American Indian Affairs Commission.

In 2017, Sen. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn) told Sen. Taylor he wanted to co-author the bill. It also received the support of the Indiana Department of Education and the Indiana State Teachers Association, helping the bill obtain a hearing and passage in the Indiana House.

“Ethnic studies have always been part of the standards a school could use,” Sen. Taylor said. “It’s just that teachers have not been doing anything with it. Now they have to offer it.”

“Students who learn with a culturally relevant curriculum have role models that have similar experiences to them ethnically,” said House Education Committee chair, State Rep. Bob Behning (R-Indianapolis). “We’ve also seen students who are taught relatable, culturally-focused lessons are more likely to have higher attendance rates and

even higher grade point averages. I was happy to be a part of the process to give students the opportunity to take a class that relates to their experiences and heritage.”

“The perseverance of the NAACP and its supporters will result in the implementation of much needed ethnic studies in Indiana high schools,” said Dr. David Suzuki, an Asian Studies professor at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). “For students who are often marginalized in our textbooks, it is important that they are provided a depth of understanding of the contributions to human endeavors that were and are made by people with whom they can identify

Ethnic studies classes can have dramatic and positive results. According to a study at Stanford University that monitored 1,400 “at-risk” ninth graders in three high schools, students enrolled in race-conscious classes improved their grade-point averages by more than one letter grade and attendance rates increased by 21 percent. The key, the study’s authors said, was making material culturally relevant to students. Not only were the students’ performance on ethnic studies impressive, they saw grade increases in other areas such as English and math.

Dr. Rosa Tezanos-Pinto, director of the Spanish program at IUPUI, said, “High school students will now learn about the history and accomplishments of the various cultures living in Indiana. This instruction will be pivotal in creating awareness of other cultures’ interests and contributions — a knowledge essential to prepare our students for a global era.”

Wayne J. Hilson, Jr., Sr. Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at IUPUI, said, “We were able to engage IUPUI faculty and staff with expertise in African, Latino, Asian, and Native American studies as both consultants and sharers of testimonies at the legislative hearings. We plan to continue and strengthen this relationship in ensuring that the law proves to be as impactful long-term as possible.”

The Indiana University Office of Government Relations office, through Becca Polcz, also commended the efforts that led to this legislation.

Research has shown that a lack of cultural competence contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline due to conscious or unconscious biases that impose harsher discipline based on race, color, sex and disability. An Indiana advisory board to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in January recommended that the U.S. Department of Education consider requiring cultural competency training at Indiana schools as a condition of receiving federal funding.

Charmayne Champion-Shaw, a Cheyenne and director of Native American and Indigenous studies at IUPUI, said advocates must pay attention to the new law’s implementation.

“It is critical to consider our next steps,” she said. “We must invest and engage in important conversations about authentic and diverse curriculum development so that we don’t enforce existing and problematic stereotypes by our well-meaning, but culturally homogenous educational system.”

Holland, who has developed a standards-based curriculum entitled “The Historic Journey” that teaches science, English, math and social studies within the context of African and African-American history, has worked for passage of the legislation since 2013.

“The positive emotional development that this course can lead will help create more well-rounded students,” Holland said. “Being well-rounded is the foundation for being productive citizens in the state of Indiana, the nation and the global community.”

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About NAACP: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest, largest and most widely recognized civil rights organization. Our mission is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights for all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.