

The Role of Ethnic Studies in Closing the Achievement Gap: Evidence from Tucson and San Francisco

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Tucson Unified School District

- *Context*
 - Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses for juniors and seniors
 - Year-long (two semester) sequence in Social Studies or Language Arts
 - Curriculum reflecting local concerns and issues, aligned with state standards
 - Students who took these courses were: a) Low-income, b) Overwhelmingly Mexican American, and c) Had very low GPAs *prior* to taking MAS classes
- *Results*
 - More likely to pass *all* AIMS (Arizona Standardized tests) including Math
 - More likely to graduate from high school
 - The more classes taken, the more likely these outcomes (passing AIMS and graduating)

San Francisco Unified School District

- *Context*
 - Students with pre-high school GPA <2.0 or <87.5 attendance rate
 - Year-long ethnic studies courses targeting “at-risk” students
 - Offered to 9th graders
- *Results*
 - Attendance: +21 percentage points
 - GPA: 1.4 grade points
 - Credits earned: +23 credits

Lessons Learned

- Targeting low performing students, but *not* remedial
- Classes need to count for core credit (*not* electives), and oriented in cultural contexts of the students implemented by well-trained teachers
- Classes need to be two semester credits
- Ideally offered as early as possible (Tucson was late)

Ultimately, ethnic studies courses done well are a promising means of closing the achievement gap.