



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

African American Studies Workgroup

2020

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Kathe Taylor, Ph.D.

Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching

Prepared by:

- **Jerry Price**, OSPI Social Studies Program Supervisor
jerry.price@k12.wa.us | 360-725-6351
- **Anthony Shoecraft**, Principal: Connector Consulting LLC
anthony@connector-consulting.com
- **W. Tali Hairston**, Principal: Equitable Development LLC
wtali@eqsdev.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 Washington State Legislature tasked the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene the African American Studies Workgroup (AASW). The workgroup was charged with developing recommendations for integrating African American history into existing social studies curriculum provided to students in grades seven through twelve and for providing professional development needed for educators to implement the curriculum.

The workgroup recommends statewide investment and supports in the following areas:

- Professional learning opportunities for teaching African American studies including intentional and ongoing professional development and trainings, incentive funding to advance teaching of African American Studies, and investments in leading practices in culturally responsive teaching and leadership.
- Policy development for advancing African American studies including the creation of a framework for teaching African American studies, an endorsement program in African American studies for Washington state educators, and flexibility around professional development funds to offer tailored trainings in ways that are responsive to district context.
- Pedagogical considerations for teaching African American studies such as stakeholder engagement and expansion of African American studies across core subject areas.

To address both the short and long-term recommendations identified above, the workgroup recommends the immediate next steps:

1. Invest in professional development supports for teaching African American studies.
2. Continue the African American Studies Workgroup to develop an African American studies framework and to advise OSPI and Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) in future work.
3. In all future phases of work, require and provide funding to meaningfully engage community members and key stakeholders.
4. Dedicate OSPI staff time to continue to support, collaborate, and provide accountability to community through the workgroup, as co-creators in realizing the legislative intent of this work.

INTRODUCTION

Background

African American studies is a multidisciplinary academic field primarily devoted to the study, politics, culture, achievements, history, characteristics, and issues of people of African descent in North America. The field challenges the sociohistorical and cultural content and definition of western ideology, and argues for a multicultural—rather than a Eurocentric—interpretation of the Western Hemisphere.¹

Efforts to integrate African American studies into social studies curriculum and mainstream education in the U.S. date back to 1915, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc.²

The 2020 Legislature ([Senate Bill 6168 \(2020\)](#)) directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a workgroup to develop recommendations for integrating, on a regular and ongoing basis, African American history, examinations of racism, and the history of the civil rights movement into existing social studies curriculum provided to students in grades seven through twelve. In developing recommendations, the workgroup must also conduct a review of pertinent curriculum that is available to school districts and include recommendations for the professional development needed for educators.

The workgroup must submit a report to the education committee by November 15, 2020.

The creation of the workgroup effectively enrolled Washington State in a growing national movement of states that recognize the community, civic, economic, and educational value teaching African American studies holds for not only African American students and communities but for all students and communities.

The workgroup's mission also strongly aligns with the work of the Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, established by OSPI at the behest of the 2019 Legislature ([Senate Bill 6066](#)). Both workgroups aim to better democratize education in Washington State and develop more academically, socially, and culturally literate learners.

¹ [African-American Studies - The Foundations of African-American Studies, The Emergence of African-American Studies Departments - Black, History, Negro, and University](#). Accessed on November 10, 2020.

² King, LaGarrett J. *Status of the Black History in U.S. Schools and Society* Social Education 81(1), pp. 14-18, www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_810117014.pdf. Accessed on October 26, 2020.

Workgroup Composition

The workgroup consisted of twenty-one members representing urban, rural, and suburban regions across Washington state. The authorizing legislation required that the workgroup include the following:

- One representative from the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA);
- One representative from the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC);
- One representative from a statewide organization representing teachers;
- Persons with unique and specific expertise, including but not limited to, Washington state historians and persons representing teacher preparation programs.

Workgroup Selection Process

OSPI recruited members from the organizations identified in the authorizing legislation. Additional members were selected through an application process and evaluated by a panel consisting of OSPI staff and community members. A scoring rubric—that included (but was not limited to) geography, participation capacity, background (including professional experience, personal background, and interest in the mission)—informed the initial selection of workgroup participants. Co-facilitators partnered with OSPI to provide an equity lens on the selection process.

See **APPENDIX A** for a full list of workgroup membership.

Workgroup Process and Structure

The workgroup met six times between September 9, 2020 and October 30, 2020. Each meeting was three hours in duration and hosted virtually by OSPI staff. Meeting agendas and minutes are posted on the [African American Studies Workgroup page](#) on OSPI's website.

All meetings were led by community-based co-facilitators. Co-facilitators were responsible for guiding workgroup meetings and providing advice to OSPI throughout the process. A culturally responsive facilitation practice was used to steward the process, which produced high engagement with the workgroup's collective intelligence, supported the creative potential of both divergent and aligned perspectives, and reinforced the workgroup's relational ethos, norms and values.

The workgroup formed four sub-committees—policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and professional development—to consider ideas that would ultimately form the basis for the

workgroup recommendations. The large group synthesized and refined the sub-committee ideas, coming to consensus on the recommendations.

See **APPENDIX B** for a high-level overview of the workgroup process.

Recommendations Methodology

The workgroup used the following strategies to finalize the recommendations:

- *Expertise* – The workgroup drew from their lived experience; subject matter expertise in culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum, and professional development (across the education continuum, including community-based settings); and knowledge of African, African diasporic, and African American history.
- *Review of Washington learning standards* – The workgroup reviewed and discussed the 2019 Washington State Social Studies Learning Standards to ensure alignment (per the legislative charge), identify gaps, and determine opportunities for culturally responsive, innovative recommendations.
- *Review and discussion of exemplars* – The workgroup reviewed existing curricula, policies, and models of professional development both within and outside the U.S in order to build off already-existing models of success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For African American studies to be integrated into existing social studies curriculum for students in grades seven through twelve, and for the needed professional development for educators to implement said curriculum, the workgroup recommends the following:

Professional development supports for teaching African American studies

- **Fund professional development and training specific to African American studies.** African American studies is a field of study that requires an intentional and ongoing effort to deepen expertise to undo years of neglect at the teacher preparation levels.
- **Provide incentive funding to advance the teaching of African American studies.** The OSPI lacks the authority to enact curriculum at the local level. Examples include administrative tools like resolutions and adopted policies to evidence of a diversity of supplemental content, teaching tools, and reference materials that represent a diversity of African American life and culture that span pre-colonial Africa to the African diaspora to contemporary U.S.
- **Invest in leading practices in culturally responsive teaching and leadership.** Examples include methodologies tailored toward increasing educator capacity to create high-quality learning environments centered in belonging and racial equity; anti-racist approaches that amplify the vast contributions of African Americans (from pre-colonial Africa to contemporary America) and celebrate the joys of Blackness (rather than exclusive focus on historical eras highlighting oppression, plunder, and pain); and asset-based methodologies that pull from all students' cultural funds of knowledge.

Policy development for advancing African American studies

- **Identify standards of excellence—by creating a framework or best practice rubric—that define exemplary practices, structures, and conditions for teaching African American studies.** Identifying standards of excellence would increase instructional consistency and statewide alignment as well as incentivize widespread adoption of teaching African American studies at the local level. This could be done in partnership with the CAAA as well as African American educators.
- **Establish an endorsement program in African American studies for Washington state educators teaching grades seven through twelve.** Additional

funding should be made available through the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to provide scholarships for adding endorsements in shortage areas. Given the teacher preparation implications, this recommendation can be implemented in partnership with higher education institutions, creating a shared investment and systemic commitment to African American studies across K–16 settings.

- **Provide policy guidance that allows for flexible use of professional development funds to offer tailored trainings in ways that are responsive to district context.** Context matters: one size of professional development training will not fit all teaching of African American studies across urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Pedagogical considerations for teaching African American studies

- **Require professional development to be delivered in collaboration with African American stakeholders (e.g., cultural custodians, institutions, and community-based organizations).** Training must be delivered in partnership with those rooted in relevant lived experience, practical expertise, and knowledge of African, African diasporic, and African American history in order to counter the racist imagery, negative stereotypes, and lack of representative content students are exposed to through current social studies learning standards and curriculum.
- **Expand African American studies from a social studies-based content area to a content area embedded across core subject areas (arts, geography, history, language arts, math, physical education, science) with integrated curriculum units.** Students should be learning about and connecting the history, culture, and contributions of African Americans from pre-colonial Africa to contemporary America through historical, interdisciplinary, and intersectional lenses. This recommendation offers a unique way for OSPI to operationalize its [mission, vision, values, and commitment to educational equity](#).

CONCLUSION & IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

The workgroup acknowledges the legislature’s commitment to integrating African American studies into existing curriculum and supporting professional development for educators. Continued leadership, investment, and momentum at the state level is critical to the overall success of this work.

Next Steps

To address the recommendations identified above, the Workgroup recommends the immediate next steps:

- 1. Invest in Professional Development supports for teaching African American studies.**
- 2. Continue the African American Studies Workgroup to:**
 - a. Develop a clear definition for African American studies.
 - b. Develop a framework for teaching African American studies to guide instructions in grades seven through twelve. A framework would help establish a clearer vision and informed baseline understanding of consistent, aligned, and effective standards for teaching African American studies.
 - c. Serve in an advisory role to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Washington Student Achievement Council in next phases of this work.
- 3. In all future phases of work, require and provide funding to meaningfully engage community members and key stakeholders.** See APPENDIX C for a framework to guide meaningful, authentic community engagement (*10 Principles of Authentic Community Engagement*).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the spirit of the African philosophy of Ubuntu (“I am because we are”), there are many deserving of acknowledgements in the workgroup process:

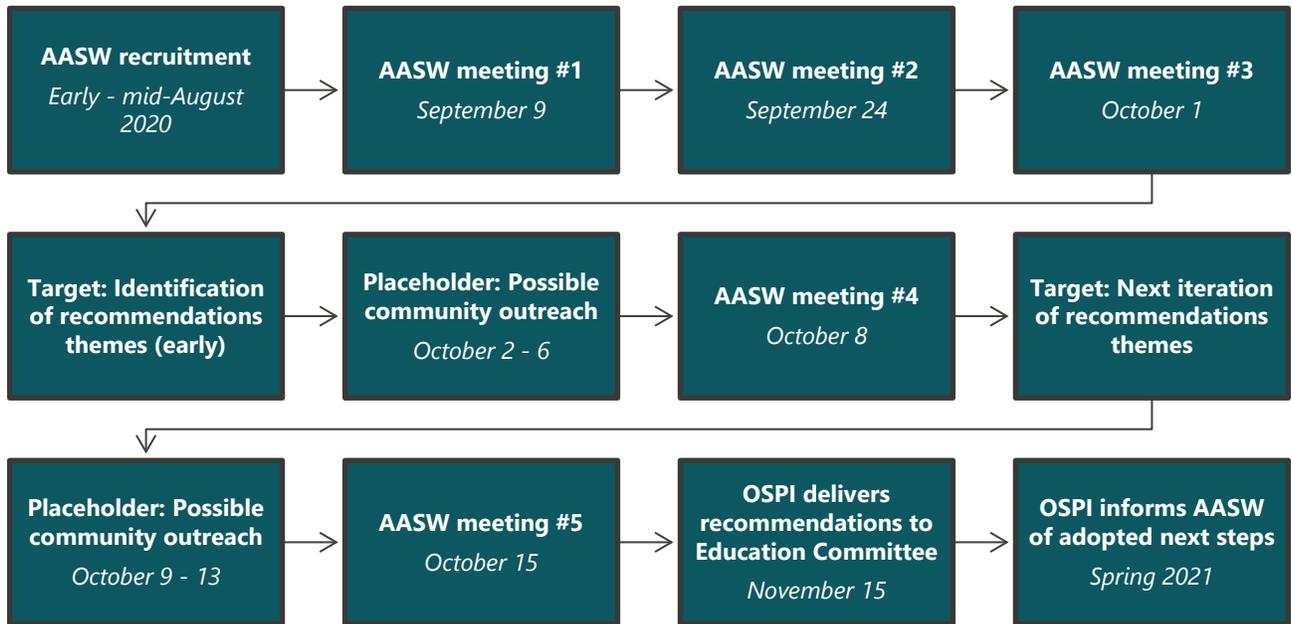
- **Ancestors and elders** – The countless way-makers, both seen and not seen, whose shoulders the Workgroup stood upon to engage in this work.
- **Members of the African American Studies Workgroup** – The brilliant and extraordinary individuals who answered the call of the legislature, lent their genius, and made this report possible in service of our students and children.
- **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction** – The staff who supported logistics and coordination for Workgroup meetings.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Workgroup Roster

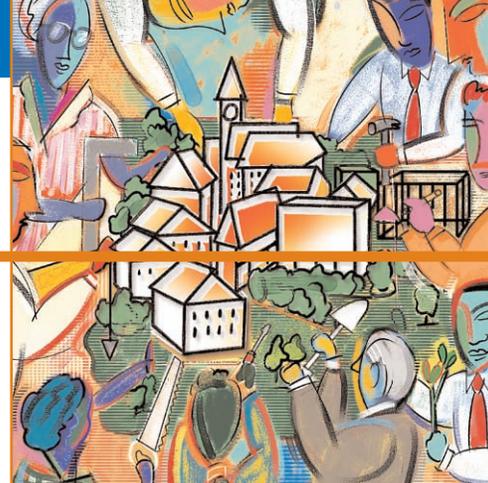
Name	Representation
Angela Stubblefield	K–12 Educator
Angelina Riley	Student Recommendation
Anthony Brock	K–12 Educator
Bonita Lee	Community Based Organization
Brooke Brown	K–12 Educator
Denisha Saucedo	Washington Education Association (WEA)
Dr. James Smith	Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC)
Dr. Kamara Taylor	Educator Recommendation (Higher Ed.)
Dwane Chappelle	Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA)
Emijah Smith	Education Advocate
Frederick Butts	K–12 Educator
Jamarkus Springfield-Worles	K–12 Educator
Julien Pollard	K–12 Administrator
Lisa Rice	K–12 Educator
Marcia Tate Arunga	K–12 and Higher Education Administrator
Melyssa Stone	K–12 Educator
Roberta Wilburn	Higher Ed. Administrator
Savanna Jamerson	K–12 Educator
Shanta Watson	K–12 Educator
Shyan Selah	Youth Education Advocate
Victoria Thompson	K–12 Educator

Appendix B: Workgroup Process



Appendix C: 10 Principles of Authentic Community Engagement

10 Principles of Authentic Community Engagement



It is common for education stakeholders to assert the need for community engagement in schools. In fact, the term “community engagement” has become something of a buzzword. But what does it really mean? How does it work? *Authentic* community engagement re-establishes the connection between schools and communities, creating more effective schools and healthier neighborhoods. Done well, authentic community engagement leads to schools that are central to the life and learning of the entire community and that embody community values. In addition, community engagement fosters community ownership of schools and education reform, helping to sustain important school improvements. Based on the experience of KnowledgeWorks Foundation and others, the following 10 guiding principles are critical. Authentic community engagement:

- 1 Involves all sectors of the community.** Important stakeholders come from all segments of the community, including parents, teachers, students, neighbors, businesses, community-based organizations, and others. Schools perform best when all stakeholders are involved.
- 2 Asks the community to engage on important questions and acknowledges its views and contributions.** It also connects with and influences official decisions. Authentic community engagement is not about getting a community to “buy-in” to a decision that has already been made. It is about soliciting community input to inform and make local decisions.
- 3 Involves the community early in the process.** In order for community

members to provide input and become educated on the subject at hand, they should be involved early in the process.

- 4 Offers opportunities for people to gather at convenient and comfortable locations at a variety of convenient times.** Community meetings should not be held solely at schools. There are numerous places where community members are already accustomed to gathering. Potential spaces include a favorite local restaurant, church, or community member’s home.
- 5 Consists of more than one meeting and allows time in the process to make informed judgments.** While opinions can be developed quickly, it takes time over multiple meetings to form judgments on significant courses of action that are based on a community’s value system and a solid understanding of the relevant information. Time between meetings is critical to digesting previous discussions and information in order to inform future discussions and decisions.
- 6 Is driven by aspirations that communities hold for their future.** Rather than centering on others’ ideas about what will be important to a community, a community’s values and aspirations should inform discussion and action.
- 7 Has a learning component that helps build community awareness and knowledge around the subject at hand.** Communities can make better decisions if they have access to current research and local information.
- 8 Allows for sustained involvement by community stakeholders.** Authentic community engagement encourages stakeholders to remain involved in the implementation of decisions and in future school issues. Authentic community engagement creates a sense of ownership within a community, which is a key factor in sustaining school improvement efforts.
- 9 Utilizes community partnerships and expertise.** Community-based organizations are often particularly well-suited to assist schools in leading and facilitating the community engagement process due to their established credibility in a community and ability to engender trust. These organizations often understand a community’s unique needs, aspirations, and context.
- 10 Employs clear, open, and consistent communication.** Schools, their partnering community engagement organizations, and community members must be open and honest with each other in order to build the trust that is essential to this process. The goals and purposes of the initiative must be made clear to all. The engagement process, decision steps, meeting protocols, and commonly used language and terminology should be understood by all stakeholders.

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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Chris Reykdal | State Superintendent
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building | P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200