



Proponent Testimony for House Bill 171
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Cynthia Peeples, Founding Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

December 11, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 171. My name is Cynthia Peeples, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the founding director of Honesty for Ohio Education.

[Honesty for Ohio Education](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [60](#) organizational partners and thousands of students, families, educators, and Ohioans who believe that every student deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives, regardless of race, identity, background, or zip code.

While I proudly represent the Honesty coalition, I am also advocating for passage of House Bill 171 on behalf of my own family. House Bill 171 was thoughtfully constructed in broad coalition and consultation with [diverse education stakeholders](#) across Ohio, including students, educators, multicultural communities, education organizations, and legislators. It improves current K-12 social studies model curricula by including age- and grade-appropriate instruction in the migration journeys, experiences, and societal contributions of communities that have often been left out of the current curriculum. Those communities include African Americans; Asian American and Pacific Islanders; Arab, African, and North African immigrants, refugees, and asylees; Appalachians; Jewish Americans; Latin Americans; Native Americans. All Ohioans deserve education that reflects our diverse histories and communities.

As a Korean-American woman married to an African-American man, raising three beautifully complex, world traveled, multicultural adult kids, I am keenly aware of the lasting harm and impact that classrooms without inclusive, foundational culturally relevant education can pose on children and adults. Growing up in public schools on the West Coast, East Coast, and Midwest, and raising our children in public and private schools, we seldom saw our realities, experiences, or culture reflected in our education, textbooks, or classroom discussions, let alone complicated aspects of our intersectional

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identities. We had to seek out basic education, information, resources, dialogue, understanding, and JOY about our own history, contributions, migration stories, enslavement, generational trauma, achievements, and movement building. The void and desperate hunt for self, truth, belonging, and legacy are all at once invigorating, revealing, exhausting, painful, and enraging.

Classrooms that serve as cultural deserts are a stark reminder that narrow-minded policy makers and simple education leaders have intentionally excluded OUR American Experience and relegated us to a random footnote in the larger unfolding story. Without House Bill 171, thousands of Ohio students will only exist as a token paragraph, single line on a heroes and holiday poster, shameful mascot, ignorant caricature, or cheap stereotype in their classrooms. Ohio students, families, and communities deserve a comprehensive, well-rounded understanding of all of the diverse communities that call Ohio home, including their own.

Important [research and evidence-based pedagogy](#) tells us that education must reflect and celebrate all cultures, identities, and lived experiences to maximize student engagement, achievement, and wellness. Deeper research shows us that omitting and dismissing, or even minimizing, the historical accounting, legacies, modern realities, and deep roots of racism and discrimination in our nation irrevocably harms students and entire communities. The American Psychological Association warns that unresolved racial trauma can lead to a [DSM-5 diagnosis of PTSD](#), normally associated with direct exposure to physical and sexual violence up to and including actual death, repeated exposure to traumatic information in a work setting, and indirect exposure by way of receiving news of a traumatic event involving a close friend or loved one.

House Bill 171 is the first step to ensure that all students are seen, heard, and are able to learn about themselves and the world around them. Ohio teachers need rich, comprehensive, culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials to prepare students for a global economy and international workplace. While more than [30% of Ohio K-12 students](#) identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and multiracial, the Ohio Department of Education shared that more than 90% of Ohio educators are white, and about 1 in 3 school districts in Ohio has a completely white teaching staff. Our educators need high-quality, diverse classroom materials that can support high-quality, culturally competent teaching.

I urge you to pass House Bill 171. Help all Ohio students see themselves in their education and connect their past with their vibrant, rich future.

Thank you.

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