

Paulina Murton
Great Schools Partnership
LD 339

Dear Co-Chair Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-Chair Representative Kelly Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Students' ability to build a strong sense of identity, actively engage in their education, and achieve strong academic outcomes is deeply intertwined with whether they see their own histories, cultures, and experiences reflected in what they learn. Numerous studies have illuminated this connection and demonstrated the significant impact of curriculum representation on students' academic performance. When students feel seen and valued within their learning, their connection to school strengthens, and their engagement and academic success increases.

A 2019 report from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) revealed a significant and unacceptable gap in curriculum representation. This report found that a staggering 87% of state history standards fail to mention Native American history after 1900. Moreover, 27 states do not mention Native Americans at all in their K-12 curriculum. This omission sends a powerful and damaging message to Native American students.

In the context of Maine, ensuring that our youth learn about the rich history and current experiences of the Wabanaki peoples is not merely a matter of inclusivity; it is a fundamental aspect of providing a comprehensive, strong and relevant education. The Wabanaki peoples stories, perspectives, and contributions are integral to the fabric of our state.

The proposed appropriation of \$100,000 to support the development of a Wabanaki-centered curriculum for Wabanaki students is a critical investment. This dedicated funding will empower the creation of culturally relevant and responsive educational materials that will directly benefit Wabanaki students, fostering their sense of belonging, deepening their engagement, and ultimately strengthening their academic outcomes.

This investment sends a clear message that we value their heritage, respect their identity, and are committed to educational success.

In conclusion, I urge you to recognize the profound impact of curriculum representation on student well-being and academic achievement. Supporting the development of a Wabanaki-centered curriculum is a vital step towards creating a more equitable, inclusive, and enriching educational experience for students in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Paulina Murton, Executive Director, Great Schools Partnership