



## Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

### LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools – OTP

### Testimony of GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) and the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

January 9, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Honorable Members of this Committee,

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders and the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics **strongly support LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**. You will be hearing compelling testimony on behalf of this bill, so we write to share some of the educational research about the positive effects of curricula like the Wabanaki Studies curriculum on both learning and safety for all students.

The school learning environment and student safety are deeply connected to curriculum. Instructional materials inform students about their peers and their world and facilitates open, nonjudgmental conversations. What is taught can serve as both a “mirror” for students to see themselves and their communities and a “window” into the lives of others, helping students to see themselves and learn about their peers and the community.<sup>1</sup> These window and mirror effects are all the more important when young people have few opportunities to see their lives, culture and history mirrored back to them or shared with their peers, as here with respect to Wabanaki Studies.

Attention was first brought to the inclusiveness of curricula regarding ethnic studies. There is abundant research showing that ethnic studies in school’s curriculum had positive effects for student’s self-worth and empathy as well as their attitudes toward ethnic communities.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits of a curriculum attuned to both the larger community in which students live and learn and to their shared place in Maine are far reaching. School climates that foster a sense of belonging and community (including through curriculum) provide a more supportive and respectful learning environment. These climates support all students, including those formerly marginalized, and often yield better test scores, graduation rates, student engagement, mental and physical health, and brain development. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates*, 7–8 (Mar. 2023) (noting the importance of school climates that “encourage and maintain respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community”); *see also* Organisation for Econ. Co-operation and Dev., *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity* 248 (2023) (“Research indicates that a positive school

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<sup>1</sup> Style, E. (1996, Fall). Curriculum as window & mirror. [http://nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum\\_As\\_Window\\_and\\_Mirror.pdf](http://nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum_As_Window_and_Mirror.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Sleeter, C.E. (2011). The academic and social value of ethnic studies: A research review. National Education Ass’n Research Dept. <http://weric.ed.gov/?id=ED521869>

climate promotes students' abilities to learn . . . with a number of studies having shown that school climate is directly related to academic achievement, at all school levels").<sup>3, 4</sup>

These insights about the positive effects of inclusive curricula, and particularly for communities who are present but too often ignored, as with Wabanaki studies, extend to students of all backgrounds. See, e.g., Antonya M. Gonzalez et al., *Reducing Children's Implicit Racial Bias Through Exposure to Positive Out-Group Exemplars*, 88 *Child Development* 123, 123, 215 (2017) (age appropriate stories about Black exemplars improved openness to Black people); Patricia Favazza & Samuel L. Odom, *Promoting Positive Attitudes of Kindergarten-Age Children Toward People with Disabilities*, 63 *Exceptional Children* 405 (1997) (kindergarten children who spent time with and read books about people with disabilities showed greater acceptance of people with disabilities); Shannon D. Snapp et al., *LGBTQ-inclusive curricula: why supportive curricula matter*, 15 *Sex Education* 580, 587 (2015) (reporting less bullying and increased student safety with LGBTQ-inclusive curricula).

This bill merits strong support and we urge an ought to pass vote from the Committee. It is an unqualified positive. It would better prepare Maine's students to grow and succeed as adults with their eyes wide open about their Wabanaki friends, neighbors and colleagues. It advances equal educational opportunity as required by Maine and U.S. law. It supports the wellbeing and mental health of students, certainly including and not limited to the Wabanaki students and those families in the community. It supports the academic success of those students previously excluded and also supports the success of all students through a positive climate inclusive of all students.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of GLAD and MAAP,  
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<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, negative school climates characterized by a lack of support, safety, and respect among students produce the opposite effect. See, e.g., Didier Jourdan et al., *Supporting every school to become a foundation for healthy lives*, 5 *Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 295, 295 (2021).

<sup>4</sup> LGBTQ students at schools with inclusive curricula likewise experience lower rates of absenteeism, better grades, and a greater likelihood of attending college or other post-secondary education. Joseph G. Kosciw et al., GLSEN, *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools* 74-75 (2020); Emily A. Greytak, Joseph G. Kosciw, & Madelyn J. Boesen; *Putting the "T" in "Resource": The Benefits of LGBT-Related School Resources for Transgender Youth*, 10 *J. LGBT Youth* 45, 45 (2013).

