



NAME Statement on Ethnic Studies, Joe Arpaio and DACA

No doubt, most social justice and equity minded people missed some incredibly good news last month. Federal Judge A. Wallace Tashima ruled that a controversial Arizona law banning ethnic studies violated students' constitutional rights, and the state showed discriminatory intent when it basically eliminated a successful Mexican-American studies program at the Tucson Unified School District.

“Both enactment and enforcement were motivated by racial animus,” the Senior U.S. Circuit Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit said in the decision.

The National Association for Multicultural Education applauds Judge Tashima's ruling. Many NAME members worked hard to establish the Mexican-American studies program. Such courses are centered on the perspectives of historically marginalized groups. Ethnic studies — often called multicultural education or culturally responsive teaching — have increased throughout the United States because they successfully enable students of color and other marginalized groups to see the contributions and struggles of people who look like them incorporated in schools' curriculum and textbooks. Traditional Eurocentric-centered education is failing in today's schools, where students of color make up the majority in public schools. Ethnic studies create an academic excitement and enthusiasm among students of all color, encouraging them to be life-long learners. Ethnic studies should be applauded, not attacked. But as the judge noted in his ruling, “racial animus” was the motivation for legislative efforts to end Arizona's ethnic studies programs.

Unfortunately, the good news that Judge Tashima delivered to the nation was grotesquely overshadowed by headlines President Donald Trump has made. His first presidential pardon went to Joe Arpaio, the controversial former sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, who persistently violated the legal and constitutional rights of Latino visitors, residents and citizens. Arpaio had been held in civil contempt and later convicted of criminal contempt only to be pardoned by Trump. It is an outrage for presidential powers to be abused in a way that only rewards bigotry and injustice instead of fighting against them.

The Trump administration also announced the end to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. DACA, a 5-year-old Obama administration policy that saved about 800,000 young undocumented immigrants from deportation, enabling individuals brought to the U.S. as children to go to college, pursue careers and start families of their own. Like business and education leaders, NAME denounces this Trump administration action as exclusionary at a time when the U.S. should be more inclusive of the newcomers, often called Dreamers.

What's clear is Trump's moves bend America away from embracing diversity. Also, Judge Tashima's ruling — hidden in the shadows of Trump's regressive actions — will likely embolden right-wing attacks to reverse the decision. Ethnic studies are crucial to getting all students to be college and career ready. Such turn-back efforts must not be tolerated. NAME lends its voice and commitment to the continuance and strengthening of all ethnic studies programs, strengthening DACA and bringing convicted bigots to justice, not pardoning them.