

College Board Responds to the Florida Department of Education

The Florida Department of Education sent the College Board a letter on February 7 regarding AP African American Studies. Here is the College Board's response.

 **COLLEGE BOARD COMMUNICATIONS** (</author/college-board-communications>)
February 9, 2023

February 8, 2023

Florida Department of Education
Office of Articulation
325 W. Gaines Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

Office of Articulation,

We have received your letter dated February 7, 2023.

We have a long and productive track record of working with the state of Florida to prepare students for post-secondary success. When the College Board undertakes the intensive, multi-year process to introduce a new AP course, we provide states and departments of education across the country with the information they request for inclusion of courses within their systems. We care deeply that high school students in every state have access to these rigorous, high quality, college-level courses. If any state expresses concerns during this process, we consider and incorporate such input only if it is academically valid. Our colleagues who work diligently in states across the country, including Florida, can attest to this longstanding process.

Many AP courses, especially those based in history and culture, deal with contested topics. The AP Program navigates those challenging waters by relying on our [AP Principles](https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/what-ap-stands-for) (<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/what-ap-stands-for>). These principles make it abundantly clear that we stand against censorship and indoctrination equally.

The recent launch of the AP African American Studies course framework is no different. In developing the official framework for AP African American Studies, we relied on the principles and practices that have allowed us to provide courses nationwide for 50 years. AP courses focus on a core set of facts and evidence where there is widespread agreement among academic experts, and they never mandate a definitive single view of contemporary events. This approach enables students to access Advanced Placement's college benefits across the diversity of US states.

It is imperative that we have clarity in our discussions with states, and we welcome this opportunity to address some key points from your recent communications regarding AP African American Studies.

- 1. We never received written feedback from the Florida Department of Education specifying how the course violates Florida law, despite repeated requests.** On three occasions beginning in September 2022, we requested from FDOE specific information about why the pilot course was deemed out of compliance with Florida law. We received a commitment that such feedback would be provided, but it never was.

The first and only written feedback we have received was through a tweet from Commissioner Diaz posted on January 20, 2023. Four of the six course elements criticized in that tweet were in fact not present in the actual pilot framework we provided you in July 2022, including readings by Angela Davis and bell hooks, and references to Leslie Kay Jones and Roderick Ferguson. The tweet also objected to “Black Queer Studies,” though no such topic appears in the July 2022 pilot course framework.

2. **Your February 7, 2023 letter alludes to course topics that you characterize as “historically fictional,” but does not specify which topics or why.** We are confident in the historical accuracy of every topic included in the pilot framework, as well as those now in the official framework.
3. **As is always the case in AP, our selection of topics for this course has been guided by feedback from educators, disciplinary experts, and principles that have long shaped AP courses.** Your letter claims that we removed 19 topics that were present in the pilot framework at the behest of FDOE. This is inaccurate.

AP’s pilot process is always designed to reduce the number of topics to a scope and sequence appropriate for teaching and learning in a single academic year. Data from faculty nationwide and surveys of college syllabi indicated in spring 2022 a need to reduce the number of topics in the pilot framework by 20%. The choice of which topics to remove drew on comparisons of the AP pilot framework to college syllabi and prioritized what is essential for college credit. We also drew on our principles for AP, including a focus on primary documents and places where the historical record is clear.

We must also clarify that no Black scholars or authors have been removed from the course. In fact, contemporary scholars and authors are never mandated in any AP framework. Instead, the AP Program utilizes our AP Classroom digital library to provide such resources, where teachers are free to assign readings but are not required to do so. Further, through the required project component, contemporary topics like the Movement for Black Lives and debates over incarceration and reparations can play a more significant role in earning college credit than in the pilot, where they were also elective but did not contribute to the exam score.

Within the official framework, the project design means that a student can select a contemporary topic and earn up to 20% of their exam score. As we state clearly in the framework – and consistent with the AP Principles – we require students to analyze and present evidence on all sides of a topic or debate for the project they select. To be clear, while a project is required, no specific topic is mandated.

4. **We did not provide FDOE a “preview” of the College Board’s official framework.** We briefed FDOE on the content of the framework after it had been shared publicly on the morning of February 1, 2023. No one in the department had seen the official framework before it was finalized and publicly shared.
5. **Finally, we need to clarify that no topics were removed because they lacked educational value.** We believe all the topics listed in your letter have substantial educational value.

We believe every student should have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the facts and evidence of the African American experience, regardless of where those students live. This course has a great deal to offer to students from every background, and it is particularly resonant for African American students. Florida has a strong track record of providing diverse students with access to AP courses: 29% of Black students in Florida’s class of 2021 took an AP course while in high school – the third highest rate in the country.

If Florida or any state chooses not to adopt this course, we would regret that decision, and we believe educators and students would as well. We look forward to continuing to work together to deliver opportunities for Florida students.

The College Board

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