Overview: This brief provides an overview of our analysis of how student participation in SFUSD's 9th grade ethnic-studies (ES) curriculum influenced several core academic outcomes (i.e., student instructional time, credits earned, and course performance as measured by overall and subject-specific GPA).

Our research design leverages the fact that, for five 9th grade cohorts in three SFUSD high schools (Balboa HS, fall 2011 to fall 2013 and Lincoln HS and Washington HS, fall 2011), entering 9th graders were assigned to the ES course if their grade-8 GPA was below 2.0. That is, we estimate the causal effects of ES participation through a "regression discontinuity" (RD) design that effectively compares outcomes among students whose grade-8 GPA placed them just below (i.e., "treatment") versus just above (i.e., "control") this threshold.

Key Findings:

Our key findings are that ES participation:

- Increased student instructional time (i.e., reduced unexcused absences) by 21 percentage points.
- Increased final grade-9 GPA (exclusive of social-studies grades) by 1.4 grade points.
- Increased credits earned by 23 credits.
- Increased GPA more for boys than for girls and more in math and science than in ELA.

We find that these surprisingly large effects are robust to a variety of robustness checks and are not seen among similar populations in high schools that did not offer Ethnic Studies.

We think these findings have particular importance because the causal claims based on an RD design are widely understood to have the same reliability as those based on random assignment.

Context Considerations:

However, in contemplating the scalability of these findings, there are two caveats that merit careful attention:

- Our inferences are defined only for academically at-risk students (i.e., those with an EWI indicator). Whether a broad expansion of ES among SFUSD would have similar effects is unknown.
- We suspect that a high degree of implementation fidelity among a small and dedicated group of teachers (e.g., several years of development, piloting, peer and outside support) characterized these results. An increase in the scale of ES offerings that lack these antecedents may not achieve similar effect.

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