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Councilors seek a more diverse school curriculum

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 09, 2012

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Three Boston city councilors are pushing for the city's high schools to better integrate studies of African-American, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander history into their core curriculum.

Councilors Felix G. Arroyo, Tito Jackson, and John R. Connolly have called for a hearing to discuss ways to better reflect the school district's diversity in the classroom.

"It's important that all students in the schools can see themselves in the curriculum," Arroyo said Tuesday. "So much of what makes the world what it is today are contributions from all backgrounds."

School officials, however, said the curriculum is in line with state and federal standards and that it already incorporates much of what council members are seeking.

“It’s certainly something BPS is working hard on, said Boston schools spokesman Lee McGuire. “We always know we can do more, but we feel we already do a lot in this area.”

McGuire said curriculum changes are ultimately up to the School Committee. “As the diversity in the city grows, we want our curriculum to reflect that,” he said.

He said the hearing would be “a good chance for us to explain what we are doing and to have an open conversation about it.”

About 42 percent of the 57,000 students enrolled in Boston schools identify themselves as Hispanic, 35 percent as African-American, 13 percent as white, and 8 percent as Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian, according to School Department data.

Nonwhites comprise 53 percent of Boston’s population, according to the latest US Census.

“One of the keys to academic learning is for students to have a fullness and richness of their history,” Jackson said.

Arroyo said they want to add to, not take away from, existing studies in order to provide students with a more global perspective.

“I don’t think there’s anyone out there who thinks the curriculum doesn’t cover European history,” said Arroyo, a graduate of the city’s school system. “There’s certainly no intent to exclude that.”

Melissa Luna, who leads community organizing at Sociedad Latina, a Roxbury nonprofit that supports Latino youths, said the organization has been pushing for a multicultural curriculum in the city’s schools. Last year, she said, the group surveyed about 75 students from varying backgrounds about the issue.

“They said the curriculum wasn’t really reflecting what they wanted to learn, nor does it reflect their past histories,” Luna said, adding that the students felt if they were taught more about other cultures they would be able to work better with peers.

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