
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Ted Fisher, Director of Policy Strategy and Outreach
Subject: **S.167 – Misc. Education Bill (Secs. 4 and 5)**
Date: April 26, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of S.167, the Senate Miscellaneous Education Bill.

Today I will be providing commentary on behalf of the Vermont Agency of Education on two sections: Sec. 4 and Sec. 5

Sec. 4 – Holocaust Education

Learning about the Holocaust, its causes, and its implications is a critical topic, both as an important element of 20th Century history, but also for the many lessons it continues to offer us in the 21st Century, particularly about extremism and violence, discrimination and injustice, and civil and political rights.

Background

In Vermont, teaching of Holocaust Education most often falls under the [College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies](#), which are the standards for Social Studies adopted by the Vermont State Board of Education pursuant to [Rule Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards](#) (Rule 2120.5 (d) – global citizenship) and [16 V.S.A. § 906](#). This is the framework that governs development of all curriculum and instructional resources in Vermont.

Overall, the Agency is not greatly concerned that Holocaust Education is not being taught in Vermont schools. Data cited in support of changing curriculum requirements for Holocaust Education is predominantly self-report, voluntary surveys of Vermont students, rather than a data on instructional patterns in Vermont schools, or results of local assessments.

However, and in recognition of the critical importance of this topic, the Agency has over the past several years, working with state and national partners, provided significant instructional resources and support to Vermont educators to support high quality, thoughtful teaching of the Holocaust. Many of those resources can be found on the AOE [Social Studies web page](#). A summary of those resources was also provided in [testimony to your Senate colleagues](#) earlier this session.



These efforts include:

- Partnering with the Vermont Holocaust Memorial and other partners on an annual Holocaust Education Week.
- Identifying, curating and sharing state and national resources to support educators teaching about the Holocaust
- Developing crosswalks of Holocaust Education with our state [C3 social studies](#), [English Language Arts](#), and [media and digital literacy](#) state standards. We are also currently working on draft model grade expectations, developed at the request of Vermont educators.

Recommendations

The Agency does not believe that this section is necessary to support either our ongoing supportive work at the state level, or high-quality teaching of the Holocaust in Vermont schools. However, if the committee wishes to advance this section, the Agency requests that several important changes are made, in the interest of supporting our current work, and not destabilizing Vermont's locally focused system of curriculum development:

1. Tighten the language in this section to reflect what is necessary to implement the data collection goals intended in this language. The Agency has already done surveys and preliminary investigations of this topic, and it is important to ensure this provision supports that ongoing work.
2. Avoid broadening the scope of this section from Holocaust Education to an investigation of curriculum more generally (Subsection (c)). Examining the local curriculum development construct of 16 V.S.A. § 906, the Education Quality Standards, State Board adopted content standards, and locally developed curriculums is a policy choice. However, the Agency recommends that any reexamination of this structure be done on its own merits, as a standalone policy project, and respectfully requests that the General Assembly not take any action that might undermine or destabilize the structure outside of holistic, formal effort.
3. Remove references to specific organizations or entities as partners. One strength of the Agency's approach on projects like this is our ability to flexibly work with many partners to ensure delivery of relevant, high quality resources to the field. Specifically calling out one organization restricts the Agency's ability to structure partnerships in the way that is best for Vermont students, or adapt to changes, innovations or new developments in a particular content area. It is important to note, however, that the Agency is working to develop a relationship with, and make use of resources provided by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a federally-funded, non-partisan entity. The Agency plans to schedule a presentation from the Museum to the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association in the near future.

Language Markup

Sec. 4. HOLOCAUST EDUCATION; DATA COLLECTION; REPORT

(a) On or before December 1, 2024, the Agency of Education shall request from all supervisory unions **a report containing** information regarding **whether and where**

how Holocaust education is taught in the prekindergarten through grade 12 supervisory union-wide curriculum. **The request required under this subsection shall be developed in consultation with the Vermont Holocaust 13 Memorial. 14**

(b) On or before September 1, 2025, Supervisory unions shall report back to the Agency with the information requested pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

(c) On or before January 1, 2026, the Agency shall submit a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education with information, organized by supervisory union, regarding the inclusion of Holocaust education in curriculum across the State.

Additionally, the report shall include an explanation of how curricula are developed, including an analysis of how Holocaust education fits into the standards for student performance adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 164(9).

(d) On or before January 1, 2026, the Agency shall provide all supervisory unions with Holocaust education resources, which shall be developed in consultation with the Vermont Holocaust Memorial.

Sec. 5 – Remote Learning

The Vermont Agency of Education supports Sec. 5 as drafted, and requested this language included to strengthen and expand remote learning as a fully fledged flexible pathway available to Vermont students.

Background

Of the many impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic, many were negative, particularly when looking at student performance and wellbeing. However, one silver lining was the advent of virtual learning. Technology and accessibility for virtual learning increased, as well as the resources available to educators, students, and their parents. While remote learning was not a successful avenue for all students, some were able to take the increased flexibility and reach additional goals while completing their coursework. A

Allowing students to participate in remote learning, when necessary, can open doors for other flexible pathways such as early college, CTE, and other work opportunities to be added into a student’s day. Students who try to do both now simply do not have enough hours in the day when they are required to be in a school building to complete their course of study.

Recommendation and Rationale

Though it is not a silver bullet for all students, adding flexibility around remote learning can both reduce barriers and increase opportunity for some students, particularly as they wrap up their secondary school experience and transition to college and career.

This language does two things:

1. Codifies and strengthens existing partnerships with the Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative to ensure Vermont students may continue accessing remote learning.
2. Allows students enrolled in virtual learning to count toward a school district's Average Daily Membership (ADM), removing a potential barrier to full time virtual learning enrollment.

We understand that there may be questions related to cost or impacts to school administration related to implementation of this section. The Agency has no concerns about significant impacts, and offers several considerations:

1. This change will be revenue neutral, as it builds on an existing partnership and appropriation, and is likely to increase enrollment for schools, even for those that don't have teaching partners (in Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative).
2. This will allow schools to maintain and offer more diverse programming to student, without carrying staffing. For example, a student could take Mandarin, even if not offered at their school)

The committee has their own language in [H.824](#), originally requested by AOE. However, the version of the language in S.167 includes improvements over our original proposed language. We respectfully recommend the committee recommend concurring with your Senate colleagues for this section.