



Testimony: Senate Education

Topic: S.87

Date: 1/18/24

VSA Rep: Chelsea Myers, Associate Executive Director

VPA Rep: Mike McRaith, Associate Executive Director

Thank you for inviting us to provide testimony on behalf of the Vermont Superintendents Association (VSA) and Vermont Principals' Association (VPA) on the proposed S.87.

Holocaust education promotes awareness, empathy, and the collective responsibility to prevent such atrocities in the future, fostering societies committed to justice, human rights, and the preservation of peace. As S.87 states, "According to the Anti-Defamation League, over the past decade, there has been a marked surge in antisemitic and racist violence in the United States and Europe." By learning about the systematic, state-sanctioned genocide of 6 million Jews and other marginalized groups, students gain a profound understanding of the consequences of unchecked prejudice, and hatred. We fully support the continued teaching of Holocaust education in Vermont schools.

We unequivocally believe that all Vermont schools should be teaching students about the Holocaust. Indeed, it is a part of the curriculum in our public school districts. To the best of our knowledge, if passed, S.87 would be the first piece of legislation to mandate curriculum in Vermont. This would be a significant shift from how Vermont has previously legislated around what educators teach in schools. Currently, to quote the Agency of Education's recent testimony about the regulatory framework surrounding curriculum, "Vermont's regulatory structure directs local boards to set graduation requirements and develop and select curriculum, methods of instruction, locally developed assessments, and the content and skills to be learned within a supervisory union. Supervisory union boards are responsible for ensuring alignment to state-adopted standards and those standards need to be inclusive of the minimum course of study delineated in 16 V.S.A. §906, 16 V.S.A. § 136, 16 V.S.A. § 131, Act 151 of 2012, 16 V.S.A § 909, etc."

VSA and VPA took note of the Agency of Education's call to align proposed legislation with the implementation of the proposed Education Quality Standards and subsequent Ethnic and Social Equity Content Standards. That work currently sits with the State Board of Education for their consideration for adoption. When adopted, these rules and standards will require each school district to provide learning opportunities that allow

students to demonstrate proficiency in ethnic and social equity studies, including the definition of Ethnic Groups as defined in Act 1 of 2019 which states in part, “...*groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.*” [As of December 7, 2023](#), the proposed revisions to the Education Quality Standards define Ethnic Groups exactly as stated in Act 1 of 2019. The State Board of Education signaled its duty to consider the adoption of ethnic and social equity content standards and appointed a subcommittee to begin this work ([September 20, 2023, State Board of Education Meeting Minutes](#)).

[Act 175 of 2022](#), stated: “On or before January 15, 2023, the Agency of Education shall issue a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education on the status of Holocaust education in public schools and its recommendations to ensure that Holocaust education is included in the educational programs provided to students in public schools.” That report has not yet been able to be provided. We have noted the important partnership with the Vermont Holocaust Museum to develop ongoing professional learning and resources to schools around the state. Based on some recent conversations with educators, Holocaust education is currently embedded intentionally into deeper unit studies, in line with C3 Content Standards, and connected to transferable skills. The importance of Holocaust education cannot be overstated. This is a vital piece of learning that continues to occur in our schools throughout the state. We hope that you will consider taking testimony from educators leading this work.

Thank you.