
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways Division

Subject: **S.87 Holocaust Education**

Date: January 16, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of Holocaust Education

Introduction

As we have [previously testified](#), by focusing on developing educational resources and supports aligned to state-adopted content standards, which we appreciate seeing reflected in the language of bill S.87, we are best positioned to ensure that our diverse school communities can continue to offer and integrate Holocaust education into their existing curricula and educational programming. The lessons of the Holocaust remain sadly pertinent today and can support students in developing the connected literacies and skills required to honestly examine the past, understand their responsibility in the present to recognize the dangers of all forms of discrimination, act in the face of injustice, and safeguard the political and civil rights we seek to guarantee.

However, we also know that education about historical events alone is insufficient to eradicating bigotry and injustice. Supporting the systems that model equity and maintain our constitutional democracy are also integral to meeting the goals and vision of [16 V.S.A. §1](#):

The right to public education is integral to Vermont's constitutional form of government and its guarantees of political and civil rights. Further, the right to education is fundamental for the success of Vermont's children in a rapidly-changing society and global marketplace as well as for the State's own economic and social prosperity. To keep Vermont's democracy competitive and thriving, Vermont students must be afforded substantially equal access to a quality basic education.

Observations and Considerations

Observation

We agree with and appreciate the bill's focus on integration with existing state-adopted content standards. We are best positioned to meet the goals and vision this bill represents as a state to ensure that our diverse



school communities and governance structures continue to offer and integrate Holocaust education into their existing curricula and educational programming.

For Consideration

There is an opportunity to coordinate with the legislatively convened Act 1 Working Group to ensure they incorporate Holocaust education standards into any draft ethnic and social equity standards framework they may put forward to the State Board of Education to ensure we meet the goals of the bill to *"enable students to understand the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping."* The exclusion of integrating learning outcomes of Holocaust education and related standards from any proposed Ethnic and Social Equity Standards framework would be a missed opportunity to ensure that the common goals of Holocaust education and ethnic and social equity standards are clearly understood. It would also conflict with nationally recognized differences between race and ethnicity, and stand counter to the lessons of the Holocaust.

Across research domains beyond education, from the public health perspective (e.g., [Understanding Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health in Late Life: A Research Agenda](#)) to anthropology (e.g., [What's the difference between race and ethnicity](#)) there is a general understanding that while there is often conflation between race and ethnicity, race is a historical, social construct where *rac*es have often been distinguished on the basis of physical characteristics, especially skin color," yet "ethnic distinctions generally focus on such cultural characteristics as language, history, religion, and customs" ([Montague, 1942](#) as cited in the Research Agenda linked above).

As noted in an interview with Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, a senior research scholar in the Center for Genomics, Race, Identity, Difference at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina

While race is ascribed to individuals on the basis of physical traits, ethnicity is more frequently chosen by the individual. And, because it encompasses everything from language to nationality, culture and religion, it can enable people to take on several identities. [...] Ethnicity has been used to [oppress different groups](#), as occurred during the Holocaust, or within interethnic conflict of the Rwandan [genocide](#), where ethnicity was used to justify mass killings. Yet, ethnicity and ethnic groups can also be a boon for people who feel like they're siloed into one racial group or another, because it offers a degree of agency, Ifekwunigwe said. "That's where this ethnicity question becomes really interesting, because it does provide people with access to multiplicity," she said. (<https://www.livescience.com/difference-between-race-ethnicity.html>)

Consistent with previous testimony, our technical environment currently does not support the collection of granular information that would allow us to report accurately on the status of Holocaust education and make informed recommendations to the Committee; and our education regulatory environment entrusts curricular, instructional and assessment decisions of this grain size to local leaders and educators.

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. [Please see relevant excerpts for reference at the end of this document.] We want to clarify that if there are expectations that the Agency will be reporting on specific curricular content across any number of state-adopted and other content standards and then locally designed or purchased curricula across myriad governance structures then there would need to be significant resources allocated to build out our current statewide data collection and reporting system that would enable us to do so. Some specific details for your reference:

- Course enrollment data collected by the State includes information on the [course](#), [course section](#), [student's section enrollment](#), [staff assigned to that section](#) of the course, as well as [students' results](#) from their performance in that course throughout the previous year.
- This design mirrors the regulatory environment of our education system and the State's investment in its regulatory body – the Agency.
- These data do not provide information on course syllabi, content, material, activities or instructional approaches (which are as, or more, important than content, particularly when talking about genocide or Holocaust education).
- The Agency does not collect course enrollment data from our private schools (approved and recognized independent schools) or home study families so our picture, by design, would be incomplete. This sends a dangerous signal, counter to the intent of this bill and counter to 16 V.S.A. § 165... *to carry out Vermont's policy that all Vermont children will be afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality...*
- Proceeding with a data collection that by law and design would be incomplete unintentionally communicates that this is a moral issue only for some people, that social justice is the responsibility of only some people, and that only some people should have the tools to identify dangers and redress injustice and become responsible global citizens.
- Finally, the above means that the Agency would need to develop and deploy a separate data collection mechanism to collect this data. Our existing data collection tool was built with federal dollars; if we were to proceed with the bill as written the State would need to find state dollars to support an expanded collection.

Summary of Support and Leadership Activities 2023 and 2024

To support supervisory unions/districts in the provision of Holocaust education within Vermont's education regulatory framework, and to align with [proposed changes to the Education Quality Standards](#) submitted to the State Board of Education by the [Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group](#), the Agency has partnered with Vermont

Holocaust Memorial, Echoes and Reflections, educators and other organizations to support professional learning and networking opportunities and to develop educational resources and tools to support teaching about the Holocaust in a manner consistent with [guidelines](#) developed by the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) and others.

Since the passage of Act 175, the Agency has engaged in the following activities:

- Community-building between AOE and VHM staff by engaging in professional learning together. In June 2022, Agency and VHM staff attended a three-day conference offered through the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), with a variety of workshops that focused on, for example:
 - How to access historically accurate classroom-ready lessons and resources based on the Museum’s extensive collections;
 - Integrating Holocaust education to support curricular goals and standards;
 - Hearing directly from Holocaust survivors and seasoned educators;
 - Participate in live, interactive sessions with Museum historians, who are subject matter experts and authoritative voices in the field of Holocaust education; and
 - Joining a worldwide support community dedicated to helping educators effectively teach Holocaust history.
- Developing and updating a C3 Teaching and Learning Framework for grades K-8 to further support schools in the provision of Holocaust education aligned to state-adopted social studies standards. The draft Scope and Sequence within this resource document identifies multiple opportunities in the upper middle grades, where teaching and learning about the Holocaust can take place. Additionally, in the younger elementary grades, important civic virtues and democratic principles are identified, as well as content encompassing themes such as culture, identity, and religion which all provide a foundation for future Holocaust education opportunities. The Four Dimensions within the Framework -- *Inquiry, Disciplinary Concepts, Sources and Evidence, and Taking Action* -- all support civic education and the belief that our democracy “will not sustain unless students are aware of their changing cultural and physical environments; know the past; read, write, and think deeply; and act in ways that promote the common good.”
- The AOE also partnered with VHM, Echoes and Reflections, and other organizations to develop and offer to Vermont educators an array of daily, themed lesson plans and live, virtual presentations launched during Vermont’s newly established Holocaust Education Week in January 2023. These resources were and are available on the [VHM website](#) and linked on the AOE webpage for educators to access and integrate into their curricula. Programming for Vermont Holocaust Education Week was designed to support the Vermont State Board of Education adopted College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (C3) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts Literacy (ELA). The C3 Social Studies standards seek

to cultivate students' respectful collaboration while focused on helping "young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (National Council for the Social Studies).

- Continuing to build [access to and develop new educational resources](#) that identify alignment of Holocaust education outcomes with other learning standards – such as our state-adopted ISTE standards, and the National School Library Standards – to support flexible and interdisciplinary opportunities for Holocaust education.
 - The [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) provides resources for teaching in History and English/Language Arts classes grades 6-12, as well as teaching with limited class time; professional development; opportunities to speak with museum curators and teaching peers.
 - [AboutHolocaust.org](#) offers varied resources, including "A Toolkit Against Holocaust Distortion", an online History of the Holocaust for Spanish-speaking educators, and survivor testimonies. UNESCO has also partnered with the World Jewish Congress to provide additional resources and facts about the Holocaust.
 - [The Anti-Defamation League](#) provides a Hate Symbols database, a H.E.A.T. (Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism) Map by state, and links to lesson plans, among other teaching resources.
 - [Echoes and Reflections](#) offers multiple resources for educators, including lesson plans, a video toolbox, webinars, online courses, and a page dedicated to answering "Students' Toughest Questions".
 - [Zachor Holocaust Curriculum](#) consists of seven lessons, through which students learn about the eastern European section of World War II through firsthand experiences of Holocaust survivor Ben Lesser.
 - [Facing History and Ourselves](#) provides over 1100 Holocaust education resources, including units, readings, slides, galleries, and lessons; a filter is provided for easy access of materials.
 - Crosswalks identifying connections between Holocaust Education and Vermont State Board of Education adopted standards can be accessed below:
 - [Holocaust Education: Crosswalk of Vermont Portrait of a Graduate \(PoG\) Through Social Studies and the College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#)
 - [Holocaust Education: Crosswalk of Vermont Portrait of a Graduate \(PoG\) Through English Language Arts \(ELA\), and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts \(CCSS-ELA\)](#)
 - [Holocaust Education: Crosswalk with the International Society for Technology Education Standards for Student Learning, & American Association of School Libraries Standards Framework for Learners](#)
- The AOE has shared and continues to share VT Holocaust Memorial annual professional development PD opportunities with the Social Studies distribution

list and in the AOE's WFM. The AOE's Global Citizenship Specialist participated in the 2023 PD session with Vermont educators. The Vermont Holocaust Memorial Museum is also listed as a resource for students and educators on the AOE's [Social Studies: Spotlight on Equity Resources](#) under Disciplinary Concepts.

- Five sessions relating to Holocaust Education were offered at the [Vermont Alliance for the Social Studies \(VASS\) conference](#) in December 2023, including sessions such as *Antisemitism - Understanding & Countering this Hatred Today*, *Eugenics Connections - The U.S. & Nazi Germany*, and *How & Why did the Holocaust Happen - Historical Thinking w/ Primary Sources*. The AOE disseminated the conference in newsletters, WFM postings, as well as through distribution lists; the 2023 conference saw growth in attendees from all grade bands and had 150 participants. The Director of Education Initiatives at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Gretchen Skidmore, was a keynote speaker at the event.
 - The AOE's Global Citizenship is scheduled for a follow-up meeting with the Director today (January 16, 2024).
- As Vice-Chair of the 250th Education and Outreach Committee, an offshoot of [Vermont's 250th Anniversary Commission](#), the Agency and Commission recognize that there is an overlap with the work of the Commission and that of Holocaust Education. The Commission is currently engaged in teacher outreach and understands that there are Vermont civic and historical connections to be made as the field provides feedback on what materials would be most useful in telling the Vermont story.
- PBGR Social Studies Hierarchies have been drafted, with opportunities for Holocaust education within and across all grade bands. For example, in grades K-2, students learn to apply civic virtues (e.g. honesty, mutual respect, cooperation) and to describe democratic principles (e.g. equality, freedom, liberty); in grades 3-5 students are asked to identify virtues and principles that guide self, government, societies, and communities; and in grades 6-8, students are asked to identify multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people, and explain how and why they may change over time.

Regulatory References

16 V.S.A. § 906. Course of study

- (a) *In public schools, approved and recognized independent schools, and in home study programs, learning experiences shall be provided for students in the minimum course of study.*
- (b) *For purposes of this title, the minimum course of study means learning experiences adapted to a student's age and ability in the fields of:*
- (1) *basic communication skills, including reading, writing, and the use of numbers;*
 - (2) *citizenship, history, and government in Vermont and the United States;*
 - (3) *physical education and comprehensive health education, including the effects of tobacco, alcoholic drinks, and drugs on the human system and on*

society;

(4) English, American, and other literature;

(5) the natural sciences; and

(6) the fine arts. (Added 1969, No. 298 (Adj. Sess.), § 65; amended 1981, No. 151 (Adj. Sess.), § 4; 1987, No. 132 (Adj. Sess.); 1987, No. 270 (Adj. Sess.), § 4, eff. Sept. 1, 1989; 1989, No. 44, § 4, eff. June 1, 1990.)

2120.8. Local Graduation Requirements. Each secondary school board is responsible for setting graduation requirements in accordance with these rules. Local graduation policy must define proficiency-based graduation requirements based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education. As required in 16 V.S.A. §261a(a)(1), it is the responsibility of the supervisory union board to ensure alignment in expectations for all students within a supervisory union. Schools may or may not use credits for the purposes of demonstrating that a student has met the graduation requirements. When used, credits must specify the proficiencies demonstrated in order to attain a credit and shall not be based on time spent in learning. Further, students may receive credit for learning that takes place outside of the school, the school day, or the classroom. Any credits earned must occur under the supervision of an appropriately licensed educator.

[Act 66 \(2021\)](#) The Working Group shall review **standards for student performance** adopted by the State Board of Education under 16 V.S.A. § 164(9) and, on or before ~~June 30, 2024~~ December 31, 2021, recommend to the State Board updates and additional standards to recognize fully the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups. [...] The Board of Education shall, on or before ~~June 30, 2022~~ December 31, 2022, consider adopting ethnic and social equity studies standards into standards for student performance adopted by the State Board under 16 V.S.A. § 164(9) for students in prekindergarten through grade 12, taking into account the report submitted by the Working Group under subdivision (g)(1) of this section.

2111 Adoption of Performance Standards Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §164(9), the State Board of Education will implement and periodically update standards for student learning in appropriate content areas from kindergarten to grade 12. **Supervisory union boards shall use the standards as the basis for the development and selection of curriculum, methods of instruction, locally developed assessments, and the content and skills taught and learned in school.**

- Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for [English Language Arts](#) and [Mathematics](#),
- [Next Generation Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#),
- [SHAPE America Physical Education Standards](#),
- [National Health Education Standards](#),
- [College, Career and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#),
- [ACTFL World Languages Standards](#)
- [National Core Arts Standards \(NCAS\)](#),

- [JumpStart Standards in K-12 Personal Finance Education](#)
- [International Standards for Technology Education \(ISTE\) Technology Standards](#)
- [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#)

2120.5. Curriculum Content. Each supervisory union board shall ensure the written and delivered curriculum within their supervisory union is aligned with the standards approved by the State Board of Education.

Each school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in

- literacy (including critical thinking, language, reading, speaking and listening, and writing);
- mathematical content and practices (including numbers, operations, and the concepts of algebra and geometry by the end of grade 10);
- scientific inquiry and content knowledge (including the concepts of life sciences, physical sciences, earth and space sciences and engineering design);
- global citizenship (including the concepts of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history);
- physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A. §131;
- artistic expression (including visual, media and performing arts); and
- transferable skills (including communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving and the use of technology).

2120.6. Curriculum Coordination. As required in 16 V.S.A. §261a(a)(1), the board of each supervisory union shall ensure that each school implements the supervisory union's written and delivered curriculum, which shall be

- aligned with the standards approved by the State Board of Education;
- [...]

2120.7. Graduation Requirements. A student meets the requirements for graduation when the student demonstrates evidence of proficiency in the curriculum outlined in 2120.5, and completion of any other requirements specified by the local board of the school attended by the student.

2120.8. Local Graduation Requirements. Each secondary school board is responsible for setting graduation requirements in accordance with these rules. Local graduation policy must define proficiency-based graduation requirements based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education. As required in 16 V.S.A. §261a(a)(1), it is the responsibility of the supervisory union board to ensure alignment in expectations for all students within a supervisory union. Schools may or may not use credits for the purposes of demonstrating that a student has met the graduation requirements. When used, credits must specify the proficiencies demonstrated in order to attain a credit and shall not be based on time spent in learning. Further, students may receive credit for learning that takes place outside of the school, the school day, or the classroom. Any credits earned must occur under the supervision of an appropriately licensed educator.

