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MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Krista S. Huling, Chair, State Board of Education

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.794- An act relating to ethnic and social education in schools

DATE: February 27, 2018

Thank you for inviting the State Board of Education to give feedback on H.794. In full disclosure I am here representing the Board, but our full Board has not had a discussion on this piece of legislation. However, the State Board Legislative Committee did discuss the matter at our last meeting on February 26th. While we support the mission of the bill and the importance of making our schools as equitable as possible, we are concerned with the legislature controlling curriculum, the changing relationship of statewide standards and local curriculum, the omission of the State Board of Education having a role in the adoption of standards, the omission of EQS (Education Quality Standards), and lack of resources at the AOE and local level to support the bill.

Commendations:

- We commend the legislature's effort to create equity for all Vermont students. We share this commitment. At our last meeting we adopted a new Strategic vision and created a committee to create SMART goals to achieve this vision. Our three pillars our equity, excellence, and efficiency. As a Board, we are committed to looking at equity in all proposed policy and will be reviewing past legislation with an equity lens.

Recommendations:

- Much of this bill discusses implicit bias. We are equally concerned and would advocate for all teachers to receive training. We would recommend the legislature funding the training of teachers. We have long been concerned with this, especially after the passage of Act 77 which now has teachers giving career advice without training. We fear implicit bias could affect career guidance given to students and would advocate the implicit bias training is well overdue.

- We are concerned that there is no reference to the State Board of Education, who is the body who has the authority to adopt standards under current legislation. The State Board adopts standards and then each SU/SD is responsible for creating curriculum. “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 (EQS).”
- We have replaced Vermont’s Vital Results with standards that are proficiency based and national in scope. The AOE does not have the resources to create and maintain locally adopted standards never mind provide professional development for teachers. The state has made a fiscal choice to cut many AOE positions and has left the agency over 70% federally funded and has left little room for state initiatives.
- We feel the curriculum of Ethic Studies could be included under existing standards and would align with the EQS, which addresses curriculum content, per 16 V.S.A. § 261. We could see local school boards incorporating ethnic studies under Global Citizenship (including the concepts of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history) or Transferable Skills/Problem Solving/Communication.
- We are concerned with the timeline of 18 months. We would advocate for a five year plan with planned objectives and resources to meet these objectives.
- We recommend resolving conflict between exiting state and federal law which could cause confusion or unneeded duplication.
- We advocate that the state of Vermont investigates how other states have dealt with this issue and would defer to the expertise of Dr. Amy Fowler.
- One of our greatest concerns is that this has the resources to be successful. We encourage that adequate staffing/resources for implementation be provided to the AOE and for the local SUs/SDs.

Overall, while we agree with the objective of the bill to ensure equity, we struggle with if this proposal is the best way to meet these objectives in the most financially efficient way/

Our student representative perspective:

Connor “Solimano expressed agreement with the goals of the bill and what it is trying to accomplish, but shared concerns that this might be another piece of legislation that complicates things. He would like to know what these changes would look like in a school system. Solimano also said he was not sure how much the Board should get into micro-managing what is taught in schools; he expressed concern over the level of specificity and over this being mandated. Solimano spoke about his school’s Global Issues Network (GIN) conference.” - draft minutes from legislative committee 2/26

