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To: House Education Committee  
From: Nicole L. Mace, Executive Director  
Re: H. 3  
Date: January 23, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.3. The VSBA has a strong interest in promoting equity and racial and social justice in schools, and are appreciative of the opportunity to participate in this discussion.

Last January, the VSBA and VSA (Vermont Superintendents Association) held a two-day retreat designed to reinvigorate our work on the [Agenda for a World-Class Education System](#). While there has been a lot of progress at the state policy level connected with the *Agenda*, VSBA and VSA leaders understand more supports are required in order to ensure implementation of key initiatives (universal pre-K, flexible pathways, proficiency-based learning, and governance reform) happens in an equitable manner throughout the state.

Before the retreat could focus on equitable implementation of programs, we needed to unpack the ways in which structural inequities form: through the intersection of individual biases, institutional practices, and formal policies. We designed the first day of the retreat to help attendees understand their own perspectives and experiences related to racial, economic, and social inequities. We identified examples of structural inequities in Vermont school districts. And we developed a working definition of equity, designed to inform initiatives at the state level and within local communities. The working definition adopted by our two organizations is:

***Educational equity means that each student receives the resources and educational opportunities they need to learn and thrive.***

- ***Equity means that a student's success is not predicted nor predetermined by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, family***

*economics, class, geography, disability, language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or initial proficiencies.*

- ***Equity means*** that every school provides high quality curriculum, programs, teachers and administrators, extracurricular activities and support services.
- ***Equity goes*** beyond formal equality where all students are treated the same. Achieving equity may require an unequal distribution of resources and services.
- ***Equity involves*** disrupting inequitable practices, acknowledging biases, employing practices that reflect the reality that all students will learn, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children.

This definition was an important step forward for our association's work in developing resources and programming for our members. We have been working with VSBIT (VSBA's model policies are a partnership between VSBA and VSBIT) to develop a model district equity policy for districts to consider for adoption. VSBIT has significant expertise on the current legal and policy framework for addressing many of the issues raised in H.3, and I urge the Committee to hear from them about their interest in serving on the Advisory Group.

The VSBA believes that the ethnic and social equity studies standards called for by the bill are important and require the support and oversight of the Agency of Education and State Board. Our understanding is that the Agency and State Board have relied on the work of national organizations with expertise in standards and curriculum when making recent updates to Vermont's standards on science, technology, engineering, and math. The VSBA would hope that similar resources could be brought to bear to support the work of developing ethnic studies standards.

We strongly encourage this Committee to hear from the AOE regarding the resources it would need to support this effort. We are concerned about the current state of vacancies at the Agency and believe that before new initiatives are added to their plate the Committee should understand exactly who will take responsibility for supporting the work of the Advisory Group and the State Board of Education that is envisioned in this bill.

With respect to curriculum (page 8), we believe it is important to ensure the Working Group is clear that the authority to establish curriculum and graduation standards is currently held by supervisory union/district boards (*See* 16 VSA 261a(a)(1) and State Board Rules 2120.5-2120.8). If the state is going to mandate specific curriculum as a result of the work of this Group, then that will open up a much larger conversation about the role of local school officials in establishing curriculum.

Finally, for ethnic and social equity work to be effective in schools, districts need more than a policy mandate or new standards. Absent resources to schools to support educators, administrators, and board members in unpacking issues surrounding bias, racism, and inequality, the VSBA fears that new requirements will lead to increased frustration in the field about adding requirements without sufficient resources to support effective implementation.

A focus on ethnic and social equity is important to the work we all do, both for the costs that are incurred when some students don't feel safe, welcome, honored or supported in school, as well as the benefits - for all students - when every student has what she needs to thrive in school and beyond. We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure that work on social and ethnic equity progresses in Vermont in a manner that reflects both the importance and the complexity of this task.