

Dear members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to urge you to immediately advance favorably H.3, Ethnic and Social Equity Studies Standards bill.

As a therapist and social worker in Montpelier, working primarily with youth ages 11-18, I find that there is a critical lack of understanding of equity and difference that negatively impacts all of our children. A frequent theme of my work with kids, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender or abilities, is to help them understand the ways in which structures of oppression, impact their daily experiences. It is obvious to many when it there are incidents of bullying and hazing, and we must eradicate them. This bill would help there.

Equally important, though sometimes less obvious, when students experience the effects of structural oppression it results in shame, anxiety, depression, and other mental health struggles. It can relieve a lot of shame and anxiety, both for those who are in dominant groups and in oppressed groups, when we understand the ways in which our world is structured unfairly. When, for example, black students don't see representation of themselves or their histories in their curriculum, they struggle to understand how and where they fit, which can lead to feelings of alienation, exclusion and depression. When white students fail to see the structures that play a part in driving their decisions about college or their future, they make decisions absent from acknowledging these social forces, which can lead to anxiety and pain. I have seen both of these things happen in my practice. When we are able to see our world and build a working narrative about why it works the way it does, it helps us know how to navigate it from an empowered, compassionate, and healthy stance.

The health of our state and our youth depend on efforts such as this bill.

Sincerely,
Julia Chafets