




MEMORANDUM

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Jeff Fannon, Executive Director, Vermont-NEA 

DATE: January 22, 2019

SUBJECT: H.3—Ethnic Studies Bill

Thank you for allowing Vermont-NEA to speak on H.3. Testifying as I am, the day after we celebrated the 90th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is an honor. Simply put, Vermont-NEA supports H.3. The bill, however, should be strengthened to ensure it also extends to Vermont private independent schools that accept public dollars.

One might assume the bill extends to public and private independent schools but as drafted, it is not as clear as it could be that independent schools are included. The creation of the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group includes the executive director of the Independent Schools Association but that is the only mention of independent schools and one could be confused as to whether independent schools are included or not, and that ambiguity should be remedied. For example, section 1(g)(1) and (2) should explicitly extend coverage to Vermont public and independent schools that accept education fund dollars. Additionally, section 2 of the bill only makes mention of supervisory unions and school districts but it should be amended to specifically include Vermont independent schools regarding the matters on which the state board of education must report.

The Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (“VSBPE” a/k/a the “Standards Board”) establishes standards by which licensed educators must comply in order to obtain and maintain teacher licensure. The bill should direct that independent licensing body to revise its standards in a manner consistent with the goals of the bill. For example, as with students, the Standards Board should work towards increasing the cultural competency of not yet licensed and currently licensed teachers.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that Vermont-NEA now has a racial equity liaison employee who works with our members to make them aware of their bias and of other forms of institutional bias found in our school system. With NEA’s support, we are working very closely with the schools and communities in Bennington and Montpelier to address these issues. We also have a website devoted to this issue, <http://www.racialequityvtnea.org/> and a Bess O’Brien produced movie about race identity in Vermont, which may be viewed here: <http://www.racialequityvtnea.org/watch-now-video/>.