



Vermont Principals' Association



Vermont
Superintendents
Association

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Nicole L. Mace, VSBA Executive Director
Jeffrey Francis, VSA Executive Director
Jay Nichols, VPA Executive Director
Date: February 8, 2019
Re: H.3 – Ethnic and Social Equity Standards

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.3. Our Associations (Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents' Association, Vermont Principals' Association) have a commitment to promoting equity and racial and social justice in schools, and are appreciative of the opportunity to participate in this effort.

The ethnic and social equity studies work called for by the bill is important and requires the support and leadership of the Agency of Education and State Board and the participation of school officials and educators across the state. 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. We would hope that similar national resources and expertise could be brought to bear to support this work.

In addition to expertise in standards and curriculum, we urge the Senate Education Committee to ensure the AOE has the staffing resources it needs to support this effort. We are concerned about the current state of vacancies at the Agency. We believe that before this initiative is added to the AOE's plate, the Committee should ensure there are positions funded and available to support the work of the Advisory Group and the State Board of Education that is envisioned in this bill, as well as implementing new data collection and reporting requirements.

If this work is going to be successful, then the purpose and scope must be clear and aligned with how Vermont delivers education. With respect to curriculum, we believe it is important to ensure the Working Group is clear that the authority to establish curriculum and graduation standards is 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.

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, our organizations fear that new requirements will lead to increased frustration in the field about adding requirements without sufficient resources to support effective implementation. It will also lead to frustration on the part of stakeholders if schools do not move forward in responding to recommendations in a timely manner.

For the above reasons, our Associations support the bill language being offered by the Agency of Education today, which we believe makes the bill more clear and ensures we do not violate students' privacy rights. We also support the Agency's request for resources to support the work through dedicated positions.

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.