AOE Testimony: S.17

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis and Martha Deiss
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Civics Education in Schools

- <u>A quick scan</u> of available data from FY20 that is not exhaustive (or reflective of the impact of COVID)
  - o High school course offerings in June 2018 found that 14 schools require a civics class/credit for graduation and 17 schools offer some variation of a civics class, but it is not required. This is distinct from standards-based proficiencies as PBGRs are not course/class dependent
  - o A scan of SECT data from FY20 for courses with civic content/concepts indicated 45% of SU/SDs offering a total of 305 course sections representing approximately 3,660 students. <u>Of note</u>,
    - ▪ there are many general social studies course codes that are primarily for grades 1-8 and not reflected above
    - ▪ the data cited here primarily reflects course-taking of 11th and 12th graders
    - ▪ a more thorough scan of this data and SECT code descriptions would be appropriate

Reflections on S.17

Technical components:

- <u>Survey of classes is not reflective of teaching content/practice</u> in a student-centered learning education system (personalized, proficiency-based, flexible pathways to graduation)
- <u>Title 16 §165</u> outlines the obligations of Vermont public schools and CTE centers to ensure that students are afforded *educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality*
- Our <u>State Board of Education Rule Series 2000</u> further explicates the above statute and details the expectation that "[E]ach school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in… (d.) global citizenship (including the concepts of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history)…" (EQS 2120.5)
- Because our education system is proficiency-based, <u>using terminology consistent with existing statute and rules is important</u> (i.e., demonstrate proficiency versus "passing grade")

- Currently, <u>for students to graduate they must meet their schools PBGRs</u> which are standards-based and developed in accordance to board rule
- The exclusion of special education students or publicly funded students attending private schools is worthy of reflection. §914(b) as written could be construed as:
  - Counter to 16 V.S.A. §165 dedicated to affording "educational opportunities that are substantially equal" to "all Vermont children"
  - Counter to/in conflict with IDEA's purpose "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education" and Congress's intent as amended through Public Law 114-95, the Every Student Succeeds Act, in December 2015 that "[D]isability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element **of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation**, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities."
- Mandating courses could contribute to disrupting systems that have already been navigating a profound disruption and exacerbate equity gaps for student groups

Achieving Purpose/Intent of S.17:

- Students demonstrating proficiency and meeting proficiency-based graduation requirements is not constrained by organizational structures like classes
- Interdisciplinary approaches, project-based learning, community-based learning, flexible pathways are all robust avenues to developing proficiency and engendering civic literacy in a manner that persists (interplay of SEL/academic competencies) <u>in addition to</u> courses/classes
- Schools are at the intersection of humanity – health and wellness, mental health, social skills, nutrition and predictable meals, workforce development, academic learning, equity and social justice, etc.; how we serve and support our students as humans, holistically, informs them as global citizens who are civically engaged and literate
- Engagement strategies are often in conflict with mandates
- Supporting implementation of existing statute and rule – through professional learning, coherence-making, grant-funding, etc. -- is an effective means of achieving stability and positive student outcomes

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