



1/4/2021

Act. 1 Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group

Report to the General Assembly



Vermont General Assembly

Introduction

This report to the Vermont General Assembly is respectfully submitted by Amanda Garces and Mark Hage on behalf of the **Vermont Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group** (hereafter, the “Working Group”), as required by Act 1 (2019). Ms. Garces is chairperson and Mr. Hage is vice chairperson.

This report, in accordance with subdivisions (g)(2) and (g)(3) of Act 1 (2019), will provide information on the Working Group’s:

- a. Current membership and meeting schedule between July and December, 2020.
- b. Progress to date on its review of State Board rules and school district and supervisory union policies and on the issuance of recommended changes to said rules and policies.
- c. Progress to date on its review of Vermont statutes and on the issuance of recommended changes to said statutes.
- d. Recommendations for school personnel trainings and appropriations to support the mission of the Working Group and to launch an interstate professional development collaborative in ethnic and social equity studies.

A Note on COVID-19 and the Working Group

Meetings of the Working Group and its subcommittees have been conducted virtually for several months because of the pandemic. This mode of operation will continue until it is safe to meet in person. To state the obvious, this is far from ideal for a project of this nature and complexity, and for so large a group. It has slowed our progress, which is why this report is being submitted later than December 15. Just the same, our resolve and optimism are strong, and our work will continue to advance.

Membership of the Advisory Working Group as of December 15, 2020:

NAME	APPOINTED BY:
Asma Elhuni	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Barbra Marden	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Bruce Pandya	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (Student Representative)
Cynthia Reyes	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Celilo Bauman-Swain	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (Student Representative)
Infinite Culcleasure	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Mara Iverson	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools

Miakoda Schultz	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Maxwell Barrows	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools
Vera Sheehan	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (Abenaki Representative)
Amanda Lucia Garces	Vermont Human Rights Commission designee.
Amber Wylie	Vermont Independent Schools Association designee
Bonnie Johnson-Aten	Vermont Principals' Association designee
Chelsea Myers	Vermont Superintendents Association designee
Heather Bouchey	Secretary of the Agency of Education designee
Heather Lynn	Vermont School Boards Association designee
Michael Martin	Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association Representative
Natasha Eckart Baning	Vermont-National Education Association designee
Xusana Davis	Executive Director of Vermont Racial Equity Task Force
Mark Hage	Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools

Act I Working Group Virtual Meeting Schedule: June 1 – December 2020

- July 23
- August 20
- October 14
- November 24
- December 15

Additionally, subcommittees with assignments related to the state’s educational standards, local school board policies, and State Board regulations have been meeting since June. (The pre-June meeting schedule of the Working Group was included in our May 29th report, which can be found [here](#).)

Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(2)

The Working Group may review State statutes, State Board rules, and school district and supervisory union policies that concern or impact standards for student performance or curriculum used in schools.

The State Board may recommend to the General Assembly proposed statutory changes with the following goals:

(A) ensuring that schools:

- *promote critical thinking regarding the history, contribution, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;*

- *include content and related instructional materials and methods that enable students to explore safely questions of identity and membership in ethnic groups and social groups, race equality, and racism; and*
- *facilitate a welcoming environment for all students while taking into account parental concerns about bias or exclusion of ethnic groups or social groups; and*

(B) ensuring engagement opportunities that provide families a welcoming means of raising any concern about their child’s experience as it bears on race or ethnic or social group identity at school; and

Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(3)

The Working Group shall include in its report to the General Assembly under subdivisions (h)(2) and (3) of this section any statute, State Board rule, or school district or supervisory union policy that it has identified as needing review or amendment in order to:

- *promote an overarching focus on preparing all students to participate effectively in an increasingly racially, culturally, and socially diverse Vermont and in global communities;*
- *ensure every student is in a safe, secure, and welcoming learning and social environment in which bias, whether implicit or explicit, toward others based on their membership in ethnic or social groups is acknowledged and addressed appropriately;*
- *challenge racist, sexist, or ableist bias, or bias based on gender or socioeconomic status, using principles aligned with restorative practice;*
- *specify prohibited conduct as it relates to racism, sexism, ableism, and other ethnic and social biases and refers to the process through which alleged misconduct will be addressed, including disciplinary action as appropriate;*
- *establish disciplinary responses to racial or ethnic and social group incidents that include the utilization of restorative practices where appropriate; and*
- *ensure that the school diversifies its workforce and provides its personnel training in how best to address bias incidents.*

Vermont Educational Standards

The timetable of Act 1 does not yet require the Working Group to submit recommendations on proposed changes to Vermont’s educational standards. We are in the process of conceptualizing how to assess and document our findings in relation to the standards, which will be a long and involved project. To this end, we have created a Standards Assessment Tool, which will be shared soon in a survey format with school personnel for their evaluative feedback and, later, with other Vermonters committed to ethnic and social equity studies. The survey will be adapted as well for students and parents/caregivers in the first quarter of 2021. This tool, in its final iteration, will be foundational to our engagement with the standards and with those charged with implementing and enforcing them.

School District & Supervisory Union Policies

At this time, the Working Group is deferring the issuance of recommendations for changes to school district and supervisory union policies that “concern or impact standards for student performance or curriculum used in schools.” Our research in this context is ongoing and requires more time.

The Working Group believes a thorough review of and changes to school district policies will require fundamentally a concerted effort at the local level by school personnel, school boards, parents/caregivers, students, and concerned community members. The Working Group further believes it should be a catalyst and support network for this prospective work by providing resources and guidance to local school boards and change agents. We are considering how best to provide this support, the forms it should take, and if it should include recommendations from the Working Group to the Vermont School Board Association (VSBA) regarding changes to its model policies and recommendations to the legislature for statutory changes to school policies.

The Working Group will be speaking with Sue Ciegłowski, Executive Director of VSBA, and others to learn about current and model school policies, how they are written, adopted, and enforced, and their intersection with state legislation and regulations. We are also interested in learning more about what school policies can realistically accomplish, how they can be aligned with the objectives of Act 1 (2019), and their impact on student learning, wellbeing, and sense of belonging. This will likely include a study of sample policies from different school districts.

State Board Rules

Under Act 1's subdivision (g) (3) above, we were tasked with reviewing State Board Rules. We began this project with a concentrated focus on the **"Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices, Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards"** (hereafter, "Manual"). These rules were first adopted in September, 1984, and have been amended multiples times since, most recently in 2014.

This Manual, as its name makes clear, is foundational to all facets of teaching and student learning. After a thorough review, we concluded it should be amended in several places to significantly improve the education and lives of Vermont's children, particularly those who have been victimized by marginalization, bias, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, disability status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

To be more precise, the Manual does not center ethnic studies and social equity in our school curricula and teaching practices. Respectfully, it must do so if Vermont's schools are to provide all children with a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable education.

Appended to this report is a version of the Manual with proposed revisions, both highlighted in yellow and tracked. They are too numerous to elucidate in this report. Generally, however, they include provisions that:

1. Broaden the field of prohibited bias and discriminatory treatment to include the categories of ethnicity, caste, socio-economic status, non-citizenship status, religion, language, and linguistic abilities.
2. Insert references to Pre-kindergarten where appropriate.¹
3. Require and enable Vermont students to engage annually in age- and grade-appropriate learning opportunities in ethnic and social equity studies as defined in the Manual.

¹ The Working Group is aware there are rules and standards specific to Pre-kindergarten beyond the EQS that are relevant to its mission. We will address them in 2021.

4. Promote, with expert guidance as needed, the formation and funding of School Staff-Community Committees in supervisory unions to establish and evaluate programs in ethnic and social equity studies and restorative justice practices.
5. Support the development of school curriculum, programs and activities that acknowledge the lived history and social experience of disability – physical and cognitive – in Vermont, in the nation, and in student’s home communities and social lives, and that incorporate disability-related issues and support systems across the spectrum of academic and social life in schools.
6. Strengthen the ability of students to participate confidently and in varied ways in the civic and political life of their local communities and the nation, drawing inspiration and lessons from the long and still-evolving record of political struggle and movement building by their home cultures and social groups to achieve a more inclusive, just, and equitable society.
7. Facilitate educators, administrators, and support personnel working collaboratively in ethnic and social equity studies across all academic grades and subjects.
8. Redesign mentoring programs to include pedagogical and other support systems for teaching and evaluating curricular offerings in ethnic and social equity studies and fostering a culturally, racially, and socially inclusive school community.
9. Conceptualize and require professional learning opportunities for school personnel to achieve success (a) in teaching courses and in evaluating staff and student performance related to ethnic and social equity studies across the curriculum; (b) in acquiring and demonstrating knowledge of what constitutes discriminatory and biased behavior by staff and students on the basis of prohibited or unlawful conduct; and (c) in instituting mitigation strategies and programs to uncover, report, and eliminate prohibited or unlawful conduct.
10. Expand the definition of “college and career ready” by adding to the current criteria in the Manual an understanding of the origins and character of ethnic, racial, political, and social diversity in local communities, the United States, and globally.
11. Educate students on how to identify, report and eliminate prohibited or unlawful discrimination in the workplace in their capacity as employees, coworkers, and employers.

The Working Group, with support from representatives at the Agency of Education, will review other State Board rules in 2021 relevant to its Act 1 (2019) mandate, and, where it deems necessary, issue additional proposals for revision.

Education Statutes

An evaluation of Title 16 V.S.A. as provided for by Act 1 (2019) is underway. More time is needed, however, to complete this assessment and to consider potential statutory changes. Our assessment of Title 16 will ultimately align relevant statutory language and intent with proposed amendments to the State Board’s Educational Quality Standards and other rules, and be informed by survey results from public commentary on the Working Group’s Standards Assessment Tool.

Educator Trainings/Professional Learning

This summer, the Working Group's chair and vice-chair initiated a conversation with the Dr. Amy Sueyoshi, Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Established in 1969, this college is the premier national learning site for post-secondary studies in its field. It offers undergraduate and graduate-level Ethnic Studies courses, a la carte, for teachers and education professionals, along with an Ethnic Studies Post-Baccalaureate Certificate comprised of four courses in total. The college offers 350 courses each year and serves 6,000 students. It also leads initiatives in public schools and with teachers.

The success of ethnic and social equity studies in Vermont's public schools will depend on the commitment, intellectual acumen, and creative energies of educators, support professionals, administrators, school boards and concerned individuals in our local communities, with dedicated, long-term professional guidance and resources from the Agency of Education and other state bodies. School personnel will need cutting-edge and sustained professional training and forums for collaboration. For this reason, the Working Group is exploring launching in the summer of 2021 a professional development collaborative with the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Conceivably, over time, this effort may encompass other universities and organizations with an established record of academic excellence, collaborative and productive engagement with educators and public schools, and innovation in ethnic and social equity studies and pedagogy.

The objectives would be three-fold:

- (a) to ground school personnel in a critical and comprehensive understanding of the history, pedagogy, academic and social content, and objectives of ethnic and social equity studies;
- (b) to assist educators to attain proficiency and confidence in developing curricula and lesson plans, sourcing digital, print, and multi-media resources, and in facilitating classroom instruction, student evaluation, staff development, and community-based projects in ethnic and social equity studies; and
- (c) to train cadres of educators and other school personnel willing to help shape and lead this new effort within their supervisory unions and local communities, regionally, and statewide. We are considering beginning this effort as early as the summer of 2021 with a group of 30 committed educators.

Expanding the Number of Members on the Working Group

Shortly after its formation, the Working Group voted to increase its number by three. Specifically, we requested authorization from the House and Senate Education Committees to add two more students and a third person from Vermont's indigenous community. The group felt strongly these two constituencies are underrepresented on the Working Group and that their voices will be even more critical when we move to analyzing the state's educational standards.

Unfortunately, the urgent realities of COVID-19 did not permit the legislature to take-up this issue before the close of the 2020 session. Therefore, we are making this request again and ask that the legislature make it a priority early in the upcoming session.

Other Exploratory Initiatives & Potential Future Recommendations

The Working Group will be studying and giving consideration to three other recommendations:

- (a) A requirement that future educators and school administrators complete coursework and undertake supervised fieldwork in ethnic and social equity studies as a condition of licensure.
- (b) The formal adoption of new policies or the enhancement of current ones to support racial justice and social equity and to significantly expand diversity hiring by school boards. These policies should be publicly disseminated through multiple pathways, including, but not limited to, the convening of community forums, school assemblies, and the production of culturally inclusive and linguistically appropriate print, digital and multi-media materials for parents/caregivers, students, and local community members.
- (c) A legislatively mandated, empirical evaluation of the Flexible Pathways Initiative of 2013 (Act 77) to determine if its objectives are being realized and can be documented in traditionally underserved populations, including among children of color and from historically marginalized ethnic and social groups, children who identify as LGBTQ+ and female, children of the working class and the rural and urban poor, and children whose native language is not English, who are multi-lingual, and/or who are immigrants or refugees.

Legislative Appropriations

At present, the funds the state has allocated to the Working Group are exclusively to pay modest annual stipends to compensate members for their services. As of December 7, 2020, of the \$15,860 that had been appropriated for this purpose, \$14,371 remains.

We propose the legislature increase appropriations to the Working Group in 2021 as follows:

\$25,000

To hire a national specialist to advise and assist the Working Group in conducting its 2021 analysis of the state's educational standards and in further refining its assessment of State Board rules. This person will have extensive experience in teaching and pedagogical research, and deep knowledge of ethnic and social equity studies in public schools, professional development for educators and school staff, and proficiency in curricular evaluation and design.

\$71,500

To subsidize one-half of the cost for 30 Vermont educators, recruited by the Working Group and the Vermont Coalition for Ethnic Studies and Social Equity in Schools, to enroll in two, 3-credit courses at the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University this summer (July 1 to July 31), plus the expense of their dormitory accommodations and support services, on-campus meals, and round-trip airfare from Burlington to San Francisco. These funds would be allocated in full only in the event of a return to in-person learning this summer. Should the latter not be possible, the Working Group will allocate funds to cover virtual tuition and related costs for two online courses.

The full cost of this professional development project for 30 educators is approximately \$142,500:

- *\$54,000 for 6 tuition credits*
- *\$41,400 for dormitory accommodations*
- *\$30,300 for three meals on campus*
- *\$4,725 for Campus Support Services*
- *an estimated \$12,000 for round-trip airfare from Burlington to San Francisco (\$400 per round-trip flight).*

The Working Group will be fundraising to cover the remaining costs. The total cost will be less if educators have access to tuition funds and other resources locally that can be attributed to this field of study.

\$10,000

To hire an expert(s) for calendar year 2021 who can communicate/translate complex educational language and terms of art, educational statutes and policies in a written language(s) that is understandable to the disability community, parents/caregivers, and students, and to individuals for whom English is not a first language. We hear frequently that the educational terms, statutes, rules and other written materials we are analyzing are dense, confusing, and inaccessible to many, which substantially impedes the ability of Vermonters to understand and contribute to this conversation. We need experts who can help us surmount these accessibility challenges and, by doing so, further enrich and democratize our work.

\$1,500

To cover meeting stipends for three new members of the Working Group, should the legislature authorize expanding the membership by this amount. Each new member would receive, in total, \$500 in 2021 for attendance at 10 meetings (\$50 per meeting x 10 meetings = \$500; 3 members x \$500 = \$1,500).

\$500

This amount is to pay for costs associated with utilizing technology platforms like Survey Monkey and Zoom, and to cover other routine technology needs.

Total Appropriation: \$108,500

The Working Group will provide the legislature in early 2021 with a more detailed budget and explanatory narrative for the programs and services listed above.

Conclusion

Thank you for your consideration of this report. Please reach out to us should you have questions. We look forward to engaging with legislators, the State Board of Education, and other public officials in the months to come.