

AOE Testimony: S.189

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways Division

Date: February 1, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about S.189. I want to acknowledge and appreciate this committee's dedication to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all Vermont students. I hold gratitude for your continuing insight, investment, curiosity, and partnership in developing and sustaining inclusive learning communities.

Agency Position Summary on S.189:

- We appreciate the Committee's interest in learning about the status of Holocaust education in public schools.
- We appreciate Ms. Steinerman's observation that the Millennial Holocaust Survey of 18-39 year old Vermonters conducted in 2018 provides useful information that can help inform the Committee right now.
- We agree that Holocaust education should be delivered in a manner consistent with [guidelines](#) provided by the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#).
- We have been engaged in work at the Agency and across the state to develop and sustain equity literacy for close to five years now. (**NOTE:** Equity Literacy is defined at the end of this document)
- We would be delighted to partner with the Vermont Holocaust Memorial to further develop educational resources and tools to support educators teaching the Holocaust. We currently provide links to their site in our [Social Studies Equity Spotlight Tool Resources](#).
- We recommend focusing on and **resourcing** implementation of existing statute, rule, and recovery efforts -- through statewide professional learning to support coherence and integration -- as the most effective means of achieving the goals of S.189 (rather than further regulatory or oversight initiatives). Statewide professional learning delivered through the Agency of Education would be consistent with 16 V.S.A. § 164a (Statewide Strategic Education Plan).
- We recommend that the Act 1 Workgroup be allowed to complete its charge under Act 1 (and Act 66 modifying Act 1) to ensure we have a coherent and unduplicated effort to supporting culturally inclusive learning communities.
- We do not support a statewide survey of all schools and course syllabi.

This is why.

Our Technical Environment currently does not support the collection of granular information that would allow us to report accurately on the status of Holocaust education and make informed recommendations to the Committee.

- Course enrollment data collected by the State includes information on the [course](#), [course section](#), [student's section enrollment](#), [staff assigned to that section](#) of the course, as well as [students' results](#) from their performance in that course throughout the previous year.
- This design mirrors the regulatory environment of our education system and the State's investment in its regulatory body – the Agency.
- These data do not provide information on course syllabi, content, material, activities or instructional approaches (which are as, or more, important than content, particularly when talking about genocide or Holocaust education).
- The Agency does not collect course enrollment data from our private schools (approved and recognized independent schools) or home study families so our picture, by design, would be incomplete. This sends a dangerous signal, counter to the intent of this bill and counter to 16 V.S.A. § 165... *to carry out Vermont's policy that all Vermont children will be afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality...*
- Proceeding with a data collection that by law and design would be incomplete unintentionally communicates that this is a moral issue only for some people, that social justice is the responsibility of only some people, and that only some people should have the tools to identify dangers and redress injustice and become responsible global citizens.
- Finally, the above means that the Agency would need to develop and deploy a separate data collection mechanism to collect these data. Our existing data collection tool was built with federal dollars; if we were to proceed with the bill as written the State would need to find state dollars to support an expanded collection.

Our Regulatory Environment entrusts curricular, instructional and assessment decisions of this grain size to local leaders and educators. Vacillating between state-level and local-level decision-making in a piecemeal fashion creates additional complexity that obscures rather than clarifies the educational landscape.

- Vermont's current regulatory structure directs local boards to set graduation requirements and develop and select curriculum, methods of instruction, locally developed assessments, and the content and skills to be learned within a supervisory union. Supervisory union boards are responsible for ensuring alignment to state-adopted standards and those standards need to be inclusive of the minimum course of study delineated in 16 V.S.A. § 906, 16 V.S.A. § 136, 16 V.S.A. § 131, [Act 151 of 2012](#), [16 V.S.A § 909](#), etc. [Please see relevant excerpts for reference at the end of this document.]

- Currently, this body has already charged the Act 1 Advisory Working Group with examining the Rules that govern public education, including a recent update of that charge passed last Legislative session. (Excerpts below)
 - [Act 66 \(2021\)](#) *The Working Group shall review **standards for student performance** adopted by the State Board of Education under 16 V.S.A. § 164(9) and, on or before ~~June 30, 2021~~ December 31, 2021, recommend to the State Board updates and additional standards to recognize fully the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups.*
 - *The Board of Education shall, on or before ~~June 30, 2022~~ December 31, 2022, consider adopting ethnic and social equity studies standards into standards for student performance adopted by the State Board under 16 V.S.A. § 164(9) for students in prekindergarten through grade 12, taking into account the report submitted by the Working Group under subdivision (g)(1) of this section.*
- Engaging in this work now, in advance of the December 31, 2022, risks creating further complexity and perhaps would put the Agency in the perceived position of usurping the role of the Act 1 Advisory Working Group -- furthering the perception of disenfranchisement of our fellow Vermonters who have been historically marginalized. This would be by the design of this legislative body.
- We currently have state-adopted standards - College, Career and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards. In 2017, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted the College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (C3) to guide the teaching of civics, economics, geography, and history within Vermont. The Four Dimensions within the Framework -- Inquiry, Disciplinary Concepts, Sources and Evidence, and Taking Action--all support civic education and the belief that our democracy “will not sustain unless students are aware of their changing cultural and physical environments; know the past; read, write, and think deeply; and act in ways that promote the common good.” They also provide a framework for supporting the learning outcomes Ms. Steinerman and other witnesses seek.

A Snapshot Based on Current Technical and Regulatory Environment

Data Collection:

- ***AP US History and AP US Government in FY21***
 - 39 High Schools
 - VTVLC (which serves partner schools)
 - 33 Public High Schools (This constitutes 60% of the schools serving secondary students)
- **SCED Code Scan (these are the reported courses from schools with grades and credit counts) for FY21** NOTE: This reflects primarily secondary school enrollments. Search parameters used keywords and terms like “History,” “US History,” “World History,” “World People,” etc. This likely does not capture the full extent of courses that could be

delivering Holocaust education. For example, it excludes courses such as Ethnic Studies, Contemporary World Issues which very likely could address genocide and Holocaust education. It also excludes 9-12 English Language Arts courses where students frequently learn about the Holocaust (totalling 12,398 enrollments). Grade level courses below 6th grade were excluded as Holocaust education, consistent with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is best delivered beginning in 6th grade or higher.

Course Keywords	Number of Students Enrolled
Contains Social Studies	6,356
Contains US History (AP and otherwise)	9,736
Contains World History/Studies (AP and otherwise)	9,467
Total Student Count	25, 559
% of 6-12 Enrolled Population	65%
% of Total Enrolled Population	32%

Field Sampling:

Excerpts from informal survey of social studies teachers

At Otter Valley UHS (RNESU) all 9th graders [...] are taught about the Holocaust. It is part of our WW II Unit. All students read the book Night by [Elie] Wiesel and answer guided questions while they read and are asked for a personal response to the book [...] in the form of a creative project. We are currently using the Holt McDougal textbook World History-Patterns of Interaction 2012 Edition. We use the text for background information on the Holocaust before we start reading the book.

Poultney – [...] I teach a Holocaust Unit within this survey course on US History [...] We use a variety of sources including: US History textbook (Pearson); Scholastic Holocaust booklet - a 40 page booklet all about the Holocaust that takes students through the causes, events, impact, complete with questions and activities; Schindler's List- watch movie and write about the story; Pyramid of Hate. One year we had a video call with a Holocaust survivor that we held live on the SmartBoard and students had a chance to listen and ask questions [...].

Rutland – ... [t]he Holocaust is also covered in the 10th grade modern world history class, which has no textbook. we are on a block schedule and my classes spend between 2 and 5 class periods as part of a larger unit on WWII. I sometimes use resources from Facing ourselves. The other 10th grade teacher in our team does similar lessons.

Northfield --Traditionally this subject had been taught intensively by our former World History Teacher. It was designed for sophomores and included an entire day set aside for students to watch and respond to the film *Schindler's List* as well as a field trip to Montreal, with one of the two focuses being a visit to the Holocaust Museum and to listen to stories from a survivor.

VTVLC Holocaust Education

Course	Module	Number of Students (cumulative) who have taken the course
World History Segment 2	Module 7	1,000+
History of the Holocaust Segment 1	Modules 1-4	52
History of the Holocaust Segment 2	Modules 5-8	52
American History Segment 2	Module 5	524
English I Segment 1	Module 2	1,000+
Global Studies Segment 2	Module 6	287

For consideration:

- This Committee has heard from witnesses about the importance of teaching the Holocaust well, but has not heard or seen data to suggest that it is not being taught at all. We strongly urge you to consider providing resources for statewide professional learning opportunities to support effective instruction rather than conducting a survey or adding another layer of standards.
- Our public education system and education staff are stressed and need to focus on stabilization and recovery. Educator workforce shortages are already contributing to school closures, personal and professional stress on existing staff, and subsequently stress on families as they adjust to intermittent closures and the churn of the pandemic. Additional surveys, data collections, mandates, etc. that are not directly in service to stabilization and recovery efforts should be delayed and/or reconsidered. Despite that,
- Our schools have been demonstrating and in many cases leading the State in the critical equity literacy work that is essential to culturally sustaining school communities. Allow them to focus on continuing those efforts rather than pivoting to a new data collection and/or set of standards.
 - \$1.5M grant funds for equity literacy initiatives in 30% of our SUs/SDs since 2019
 - As of the start of FY22 30 dedicated DEI positions across 25 SUs/SDs
 - 46% of all SUs/SDs and +400% growth since 2019
 - 10/14 Counties have SUs/SDs with DEIs (71%)

- The Agency co-chaired a [New England Task Force to Diversify the Educator Workforce \(NESCC DEW\)](#) with our sister education agencies and state representatives beginning in 2019 and published a report that has a very specific set of practices and recommendations.
- The Agency supported a [Vermont Task Force](#) to develop a webinar series where we had close to 150 participants, during the pandemic, attend including 32% of VT superintendents participated in VT DEW's webinar series.
- We recommend allowing the existing policy work that the VSBA and local boards have been engaged in to continue as a driver for systems equity literacy. Policies – VSBA: <https://www.vtvsba.org/copy-of-model-policy-manual>
- The Agency of Education recognizes that the C3 is a 'framework' that serves as a guide and intentionally preserves the choices regarding appropriate grade-level content to local decision-making. This year the Agency is utilizing the framework, with its connections to ELA/Literacy and focus on inquiry, to work with the field to build out the current C3 sample to make it more useable for educators and make the disciplinary concepts and practices more accessible to students. While honoring the [sample PBGR/indicator](#) document previously developed by Vermont K-12 educators, this work could entail refining both the current proficiencies and/or indicators; providing sample content and resources relevant to each discipline at all grade levels; and developing a crosswalk highlighting connections between the C3 and extended learning opportunities. This would be a wonderful collaboration with the Holocaust Memorial.

Helpful Links and Additional Reference Material:

Equity Literacy:

Equity literacy is a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable schools. The foundations of equity literacy are (1) a commitment to deepening individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and (2) the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity. At the individual level, when we embrace equity literacy we learn to become a *threat to the existence of inequity* and an active *cultivator of equity* in our spheres of influence.

Regulatory Excerpts:

16 V.S.A. § 906. Course of study

- (a) *In public schools, approved and recognized independent schools, and in home study programs, learning experiences shall be provided for students in the minimum course of study.*
- (b) *For purposes of this title, the minimum course of study means learning experiences adapted to a student's age and ability in the fields of:*
- (1) *basic communication skills, including reading, writing, and the use of numbers;*
 - (2) *citizenship, history, and government in Vermont and the United States;*
 - (3) *physical education and comprehensive health education, including the effects of tobacco, alcoholic drinks, and drugs on the human system and on society;*

- (4) English, American, and other literature;
- (5) the natural sciences; and
- (6) the fine arts. (Added 1969, No. 298 (Adj. Sess.), § 65; amended 1981, No. 151 (Adj. Sess.), § 4; 1987, No. 132 (Adj. Sess.); 1987, No. 270 (Adj. Sess.), § 4, eff. Sept. 1, 1989; 1989, No. 44, § 4, eff. June 1, 1990.)

2111 Adoption of Performance Standards Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §164(9), the State Board of Education will implement and periodically update standards for student learning in appropriate content areas from kindergarten to grade 12. **Supervisory union boards shall use the standards as the basis for the development and selection of curriculum, methods of instruction, locally developed assessments, and the content and skills taught and learned in school.**

- Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for [English Language Arts](#) and [Mathematics](#),
- [Next Generation Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#),
- [SHAPE America Physical Education Standards](#),
- [National Health Education Standards](#),
- [College, Career and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#),
- [ACTFL World Languages Standards](#)
- [National Core Arts Standards \(NCAS\)](#),
- [Jump\\$tart Standards in K-12 Personal Finance Education](#)
- [International Standards for Technology Education \(ISTE\) Technology Standards](#)
- [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#)

2120.5. Curriculum Content. **Each supervisory union board shall ensure the written and delivered curriculum within their supervisory union is aligned with the standards approved by the State Board of Education.**

Each school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in

- a. literacy (including critical thinking, language, reading, speaking and listening, and writing);
- b. mathematical content and practices (including numbers, operations, and the concepts of algebra and geometry by the end of grade 10);
- c. scientific inquiry and content knowledge (including the concepts of life sciences, physical sciences, earth and space sciences and engineering design);
- d. global citizenship (including the concepts of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history);
- e. physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A. §131;
- f. artistic expression (including visual, media and performing arts); and
- g. transferable skills (including communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving and the use of technology).

2120.6. Curriculum Coordination. As required in 16 V.S.A. §261a(a)(1), the board of each supervisory union shall ensure that each school implements the supervisory union's written and delivered curriculum, which shall be

- a. **aligned with the standards approved by the State Board of Education;**

b. [...]

2120.7. Graduation Requirements. *A student meets the requirements for graduation when the student demonstrates evidence of proficiency in the curriculum outlined in 2120.5, and completion of any other requirements specified by the local board of the school attended by the student.*

2120.8. Local Graduation Requirements. ***Each secondary school board is responsible for setting graduation requirements in accordance with these rules. Local graduation policy must define proficiency-based graduation requirements based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education.** As required in 16 V.S.A. §261a(a)(1), it is the responsibility of the supervisory union board to ensure alignment in expectations for all students within a supervisory union. Schools may or may not use credits for the purposes of demonstrating that a student has met the graduation requirements. When used, credits must specify the proficiencies demonstrated in order to attain a credit and shall not be based on time spent in learning. Further, students may receive credit for learning that takes place outside of the school, the school day, or the classroom. Any credits earned must occur under the supervision of an appropriately licensed educator.*

Reference Sites

Equity Literacy: <https://www.equityliteracy.org/equity-literacy>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum main page: <https://www.ushmm.org/>

ADL Tracker of Anti-Semitism: <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-tracker-of-antisemitic-incidents>

Policies – VSBA: <https://www.vtvsba.org/copy-of-model-policy-manual>