



Social Equity Caucus
an Inclusive Learning Community

4/7/2021

Dear Senate Education Committee,

We are writing to raise concerns about the recent appointments to the State Board of Education - specifically, the process for those appointments and the resulting impact on our state.

In February, Governor Scott appointed Lyle Jepson and Tom Lovett to fill two Board vacancies, and they were sworn in at the State Board meeting on [March 17th, 2020](#). All of that occurred summarily and to our knowledge without the prior advice and consent of the Senate, required by Vermont Statute 16 V.S.A. § 16. That section provides that "consideration shall be given to the selection of [the members] as shall adequately represent all sections of the state."

In bypassing the required advice and consent, Governor Scott and the State Board did not allow for a fuller consideration of the candidates and whether they -- and, moreover, the Board as a whole - are adequately representative of Vermont's diverse school communities. [Act 1 includes](#) a detailed narrative of why diverse representation is imperative, and yet at this point in our history it is disappointing to see yet two more white men appointed to a Board already lacking in diverse membership without any meaningful conversation.

We raise these concerns not to cast any aspersions on these individual appointees, but rather to point out the perspectives missing from the State Board. In the near future, the Board will be considering the implementation of pupil weighting; the recommendations brought forth by the Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group; literacy changes; pandemic transition; and students mental health concern. All these topics will have a tremendous impact on the well-being of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other People of Color, People with Disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ students, and yet there are few Board representatives that can bring the lived experience and perspective of those communities to the forefront.

Additionally, the current Board does not represent all geographical regions in Vermont. There are no representatives from central Vermont, no one from Burlington, and no one from southeast Vermont. Two people from St. Johnsbury and two from Manchester; half bring an independent school expertise and focus.

In 1999, the Vermont Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a report [titled Racial Harassment in Vermont Public Schools](#) which concluded that "racial harassment" appeared "pervasive in and around the State's public schools," and observed that "the elimination of this harassment" was "not a priority among school administrators, school boards, elected officials, and State agencies charged with civil rights enforcement." In 2003, the Commission released a [follow-up report](#) concluding that some curriculum materials and lesson plans promoted racial stereotypes.

In December 2017, the [Act 54 report on Racial Disparities in State Systems](#), issued by the Attorney General and Human Rights Commission, stated that education is one of the five State systems in which racial disparities persist and need to be addressed. One of the key recommendations for accomplishing this was to "teach children from an integrated curriculum that fairly represents both the contributions of

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People of Color (as well as indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, etc.), while fairly and accurately representing our history of oppression of these groups.”

“Other recommendations included educating State employees about implicit bias, white privilege, white fragility, and white supremacy and increasing the representation of people of color in the State and school labor forces by focusing on recruitment, hiring, and retention, as well as promotion of people of color into positions of authority and responsibility on boards and commissions.” We should note that increasing the number of Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC) on various boards is a priority for the Governor, evidenced by his recent creation of the Governor’s Racial Equity Taskforce which recently issued recommendations about getting more BIPOC in these positions.

Governor Scott and the State Board have the opportunity to change and improve education in our state and help so many young Vermonters. They fell short with the appointment of these two board members. It is our hope that in the future, recommendations such as these are taken into account.

Sincerely,

The Social Equity Caucus

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