
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry

Respectfully Submitted by: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways
Ian Burfoot-Rochford, Health & Physical Education Specialist, Student Pathways

Subject: H.274

Date: March 31, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of nutrition and agriculture education as defined in H.274.

H.274 proposes the following:

to amend 16 V.S.A. §906(5) to include nutrition and agriculture;

direct [t]he Secretary, in conjunction with the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, shall develop an agriculture and nutrition education curriculum for elementary and secondary schools [...] and that [t]he curriculum shall include teaching about the cultivation of food, farming practices, and nutritional benefits;

direct [t]he State Board of Education shall ensure that agriculture and nutrition education is included in its education quality standards under subdivision 165(a)(3)(B) of this title;

And that [e]ach supervisory union shall ensure that agriculture and nutrition education is included in its union-wide curriculum.

Nutrition Education

Nutrition instruction is already required in Vermont Schools in accordance with 16 V.S.A. §906, 16 V.S.A. §131, and 16 V.S.A. §136 (recently amended as a result of Act 66 of 2021); as defined in our State Board of Education (SBE) state-adopted standards and Education Quality Standards (EQS) Rule Series 2000; and as articulated in the National School Lunch Program.

16 V.S.A. §906 outlines the minimum course of study that schools must provide instruction in, including physical education and comprehensive health education.

- 16 V.S.A. §131 states, “As used in this title, “comprehensive health education” means a systematic and extensive elementary and secondary educational program designed to provide a variety of learning experiences based upon knowledge of the human



organism as it functions within its environment. The term includes the study of: [...] **(10) Nutrition.**”

- The Vermont State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the SHAPE America Standards and the National Health Education Standards in 2015
- National [Physical Education Standards](#) and [Health Education Standards](#) both integrate knowledge/skills related to the study of nutrition throughout K-12 standards
- *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: [...] c. scientific inquiry and content knowledge (including the concepts of life sciences, physical sciences, earth and space sciences and engineering design); [...] physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A. §131; [...]*
- High quality nutrition education through comprehensive health education extends beyond nutrition science. Health and Physical Education teachers are uniquely trained to take an integrated approach to deliver comprehensive health education (e.g., eating disorders, body image, etc.) (see [Rules Governing the Licensing of Educators and the Preparation of Educational Professionals Rule Series 5100](#))
- All school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required to have a Local Wellness Policy, which must include *[s]pecific goals for nutrition promotion and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness. In developing these goals, local educational agencies must review and consider evidence-based strategies and techniques.* ([7.CFR.210.31](#)) (see [VT Local Wellness Policy Guide](#))

Agriculture Education

Science education is already required in Vermont Schools in accordance with [16 V.S.A. §906](#); and as defined in our State Board of Education (SBE) state-adopted standards and [Education Quality Standards \(EQS\) Rule Series 2000](#).

[16 V.S.A. §906](#) outlines the minimum course of study that schools must provide instruction in, including the natural sciences (16 V.S.A. §906 (5)). It does not articulate all fields or branches of scientific study individually.

The natural sciences are generally comprised of two major branches: the life sciences and physical sciences. There are dozens of branches/fields of study within the life sciences and applied life sciences.

- *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: [...] c. **scientific inquiry and content knowledge (including the concepts of life sciences, physical sciences, earth and space sciences and engineering design); [...]** physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A. §131; [...]*

- The state board adopted the [Next Gen Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#) to guide science instruction in the state’s schools
- Many CTE centers (8) run agriculture programs ([VACTED programs](#)) which outline the state-adopted standards and proficiencies addressed and [Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources Career Cluster and Pathway Standards](#) (see [VT CTE Diversified Agriculture Education](#))
- [Future Farmers of America](#) is one of four Career Technical Student Organizations in Vermont
- The NGSS and CTE Career Cluster and Pathway standards make direct connections to food and plant life (to see these connections see [Standards Alignment - Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education](#))
- Teaching of Agriculture Science encouraged through the Rozo-McLaughlin Farm to School Program
 - As stated in [6 V.S.A. §4721](#), “[t]here is created in the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets the Rozo McLaughlin Farm-to-School Program to execute, administer, and award local grants for the purpose of helping Vermont schools develop farm-to-school programs that will sustain relationships with local farmers and producers, enrich the educational experience of students, improve the health of Vermont children, and enhance Vermont’s agricultural economy.”
 - See [FY22 FTSEC Impact Report Feb2023.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#) for more information on the impact of this program on schools across the state

AOE Observations and Recommendations

Specifying nutrition in 16 V.S.A. §906 (5) within the natural sciences would not only add a specific field of scientific study excluding all others and inconsistent with the current language, it would also add a redundancy with what is already required under 16 V.S.A. §131 and §906 (3) and as outlined in EQS 2120.5 and national Comprehensive Health Education content standards adopted by the state.

Specifying nutrition education or agriculture in 16 V.S.A. §906 (5) within the natural sciences would not only add a specific branch and fields of scientific study excluding all others and inconsistent with the current language, it would also conflict with EQS 2120.5.

Requested changes to 16 V.S.A. §906 would have greater downstream impacts in other statutes/regulation including Education Quality Standards that are currently undergoing review for proposed changes. These changes would be highly disruptive, and divergent from current education regulation, responsibilities, and delivery systems.

- ***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***

- **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...*
- **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...*

The bill does not appropriate the necessary funds to support the personnel and resources that would be required to develop a statewide curriculum for K-12 and CTE that can be aligned to current state-adopted and federal standards, or funding to support what would be a demanding and far-reaching training and implementation schedule to support adoption or integration of the state-developed curriculum.