

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Education Committee  
FROM: Jeff Fannon, Executive Director, Vermont-NEA  
DATE: January 18, 2024  
RE: S.87 – Holocaust Studies Bill

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Thank you for inviting me to speak with you about S.87, the Holocaust studies bill. We fully support the continued teaching of the Holocaust in Vermont schools. Indeed, it is vital that we never forget the horrors of the Holocaust and that our students learn about the atrocities committed against the Jewish people.

As was pointed out yesterday, however, the bill would best accomplish its stated goals by requiring the proposed Act 1 standards to be revised to include teaching about the Holocaust. The Education Quality Standards, being revised by the Act 1 racial equity standards, is the logical place to include teaching about the Holocaust, and all schools that receive public education fund money should be required to adhere to these new standards—it's not too late.

While amending the new Act standards makes good sense, what we at Vermont-NEA know is that almost every student graduates having received lessons in the Holocaust. Indeed, when I unscientifically asked teachers last fall whether they were teaching about the Holocaust most laughed at me and said, “of course we are teaching about the Holocaust.” I believe you’ve heard from teachers and the AOE about how the existing social studies and language arts standards already include Holocaust standards. These documents are C3 (college, career, civic life) and CCSS (common core standards) Standards as well as the Portrait of a Graduate, and they do not mandate how or what specific content within the Holocaust, but they specify the skills we want all students to be able to acquire through their lessons and discussions.

Social Studies:

<https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-c3-standards-holocaust-education.pdf>

Language Arts:

<https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-ela-standards-holocaust-education.pdf>

Other: <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-iste-aasl-standards-holocaust-education.pdf>

As the AOE pointed out yesterday, that is the Vermont tradition—establishing state standards that local school boards, curriculum directors, and teachers then implement.

Notwithstanding the fact that Vermont's public schools already are teaching about the Holocaust and the state has Holocaust standards, both of which Vermont-NEA supports, Vermont-NEA opposes S.87 for technical and long-standing reasons. Requiring what to teach and how to teach a specific subject runs counter to the state's approach to locally accountable public community supported schools, which Vermont-NEA always has supported. It also misses the fact that Vermont's professional teachers are teaching the Holocaust, as prescribed by the above-listed standards; however, if some teacher is not teaching about the Holocaust that needs to be addressed locally and not through a bill.

Finally, if you insist on passing the bill, at a minimum section 5, the effective date, should be amended to say the requirements in the bill are not effective unless and until the Agency hires an employee who is responsible for the technical assistance required of the Agency. Without that change, schools will be left with a requirement but no support as envisioned by this bill.