



12/28/2022

Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group

Report to the General Assembly:
2022



Introduction	1
Membership of the Advisory Working Group as of December 31, 2022:	1
Statutory Mandate of the Act 1 Working Group	2
Educational Quality Standards Manual	3
School District & Supervisory Union Policies	5
Hiring a Special Consultant	5
Public Outreach & Presentations	6
Conclusion	6

Introduction

This report to the Vermont General Assembly is respectfully submitted by Amanda Garcés and Mark Hage on behalf of the **Vermont Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group** (hereafter, the “Working Group), as required by Act No. 66 (S.115). Education; miscellaneous and Act1 (2019). Ms. Garces is chairperson of the Working Group and Mr. Hage is co-chairperson.

This report will summarize the efforts and work products of the Working Group in 2022, update its membership, and outline the work that remains in the last six months of the group’s mandate.

A Note on COVID-19 and the Working Group

All meetings of the Working Group and its subcommittees in 2022 were conducted virtually. The group anticipates continuing with this mode of operation in 2023.

Membership of the Advisory Working Group as of December 31, 2022:

Name	Appointed by
Addie Lentzner	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Amanda Garces (Chair)	Vermont Human Rights Commission
Amanda Rohdenburg	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Barbra Marden	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Celilo Bauman-Swain	Education Justice Coalition ((DBA VCESES)
Chelsea Myers	the Executive Director of the Vermont Superintendents Association or designee;
Cynthia Reyes	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Diego Soria	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)

Heather Bouchey	The Secretary of Education designee
Heather Lynn	Executive Director of the Vermont School Boards Association
Yvonna Stewart	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Julie Hansen	the Executive Director of the Vermont Independent Schools Association or designee
Joyce Lee	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Lynn Murphy	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Mark Hage (co-chair)	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Nicholas Lalanne	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Miakoda Schultz	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Michael Martin	Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association;
Mike McGraith	Vermont Principals Association
Natasha Eckart Baning	The Vermont-National Education Association
Vera Sheehan	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)
Xusana Davis	Executive Director of Racial Equity
Mikaela Simms	Education Justice Coalition (DBA VCESES)

We want to express our deep gratitude to several former members of the Working Group who generously contributed their time, expertise, and lived experiences to our deliberations in the past three years. They are: Amber Wyley, Asma Elhuni, Bonnie Johnson-Aten, Bruce Pandya, Infinite Culcleasure, Maxwell Barrows, and Mara Iverson.

Statutory Mandate of the Act 1 Working Group

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

Educational Quality Standards Manual

In April, the Working Group submitted to the State Board of Education a comprehensive draft of revisions to the state’s longstanding Education Quality Standards Manual of Rules and Practices (EQS Manual). This was the fruit of nearly two-and-a-half years of research, deliberations, and public engagement by the Working Group and its EQS Subcommittee.

Our document is now at the center of an extensive review by an EQS Subcommittee created by the Vermont State Board of Education. Ms. Garces and Mr. Hage, and, on occasion, other members of the Working Group, have met with the subcommittee at its regular meetings or responded in writing to correspondence from its chairpersons, Tammy Kolbe and Kim Gleason.

Additionally, the Working Group provided to the State Board's EQS Subcommittee these documents:

1. Supplemental Guidance to the Working Group's EQS Manual submission. [Linked here.](#)
2. An Explanatory Narrative on the genesis of and rationale for the Working Group's definition of "ethnic group" in Section 2114 {Definitions} of the proposed revisions to the EQS Manual. [Linked here.](#)
3. A recommended definition of "critical thinking," per a request from the State Board's EQS Subcommittee. [Linked Here.](#)
4. A written response, including recommendations for revisions, to EQS "technical corrections" proposed and submitted by the Agency of Education to the State Board of Education's EQS Subcommittee. [Linked here.](#)

You can find all the above documents (and more, including the most current edition of the revised EQS Manual, with contributions from the Working Group and the State Board of Education's EQS Subcommittee) [at this link.](#)

With respect to the document cited in point 2 above ("Explanatory Narrative"), the Working Group composed it after certain individuals in the public sphere questioned the content and reasoning behind our definition of "ethnic group" and, by implication, its purpose. This is chiefly because our proposed wording for "**ethnic group**" is structured as an actual definition, rather than consisting solely of references to certain "ethnic groups" as found in Act 1 (2019).

In other words, the statute **lists** several ethnic groups, but it does not **define** "ethnic group." Our EQS Manual submission, taking guidance from Act 1 (2019), offers a cogent definition of "ethnic group," one that expresses the term's essential qualities and meaning. This is the purpose of a definition generally. Our approach here is also consistent with the methodology we followed with every definition added to the EQS Manual or revised in the original version.

Further, because our definition of "ethnic group" articulates the term's essential qualities, we feel strongly this makes it more inclusive than the language in the statute. As we said of the definition in our Explanatory Narrative, "*It will ensure that all ethnic and racial identities are properly recognized in their relevance to student learning, personal growth, self-esteem, safety, and sense of belonging. This inclusivity will also facilitate the development of curricula and educational programs that are obligated to*

serve students from all ethnic, racial and cultural communities, aligning with and re-enforcing other inclusive practices and definitions in the revised EQS Manual....”

The definition of “ethnic group” in the Working Group’s EQS Manual submission was unanimously endorsed.

School District & Supervisory Union Policies

The Working Group established a subcommittee to consider how best to conceptualize and issue recommendations for changes to school district and supervisory union policies that “concern or impact standards for student performance or curriculum used in schools.” We are undertaking this project with counsel from Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director of Vermont School Boards Association, along with contributions from other members of the Working Group. Our research and discussion in this context are ongoing.

Hiring a Special Consultant

In 2021, the legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the Agency of Education to hire a consultant(s) to assist the Working Group in designing a comprehensive framework to design and embed an Ethnic Studies framework and criteria in Vermont’s Educational Content Standards, Pre-K through Grade 12, and to offer guidance on the drafting of recommendations on how to create or enhance new school board policies to advance the implementation of an Ethnic Studies framework and criteria.

After encountering difficulties in the early bidding stages due to COVID and other contingencies, we are delighted to announce that a team of consultants has been chosen. They are experts in their respective fields and have partnered with school districts across the country in the field of Ethnic Studies.

At its December 15th meeting, the Working Group formally appointed three of its members to collaborate with the consultants on an ongoing basis to help structure and facilitate the consultants’ engagements with the Working Group. Dialogue and projects between the consultants and the Working Group as a whole will commence in mid-January, 2023. (Ms. Garces and Mr. Hage initiated discussions with the consultants in early December to lay a foundation for the work to come in the new year.)

When the Working Group began its work in 2019, under the terms of Act 1 (2019), we aspired to be finished with the Ethnic Studies recommendations by the end of this year. That deadline, unfortunately, proved beyond our reach after we discovered the need to secure funding first from the legislature to hire a consultant(s). Later, our work with the EQS Manual took longer than anticipated, the RFP process for the consultant(s) hit unanticipated snags, and the pandemic slowed our progress across the board.

Consequently, we will finish the development of an Ethnic Studies framework in May of 2023, in preparation for writing a final report with recommendations to the legislature in June.

Public Outreach & Presentations

Working Group members made presentations to a host of groups and conferences in 2022, including at the annual meeting of the Vermont School Board Association, the Rowland Foundation Conference, an Educators of Color Association retreat, and various school board meetings and other community gatherings.

Conclusion

Thank you for your consideration of this report. Please reach out to us should you have questions or would like us to present to any legislative committees. We look forward to engaging with legislators, the State Board of Education, and other public officials in the final six months of our mandate in 2023.