

Dear State Board of Education,

I write to provide my thoughts on the Vermont Agency of Education's new Rules to the State Education Quality Standards (the "Standards") that implement the recent state legislation mandating "equitable, antiracist, culturally responsive, anti-discriminatory and inclusive" curricula for all students (the "legislation"). This is a good thing and very important. The legislation requires the Standards to include ethnic groups "that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide" and that the curriculum address "antisemitism." This was the language that the Legislature included as Section B of the definition of Ethnic Groups.

However, I have learned that the Agency or the Board drafting the Rules has sought to eliminate Section B of the definition of ethnic groups, thus effectively excluding the Jewish people from the definition of Ethnic Groups. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the AJC, and Jewish Communities of Vermont are all deeply concerned about leaving Section B's definition out. In fact, I would argue that the gruesome, deplorable, and heinous events of the past days in Israel and some of the reactions around the world against Israel, even after these barbaric crimes, are enough support to include Section B.

**To be clear, "*Judaism is the ethnic religion of the Jewish People. It is comprised of the ancient beliefs, mythologies, and laws of the Jewish tribe. Judaism is not a religion in the western or modern sense. It's a word to describe all of the cultural and spiritual characteristics that make our tribe what it is.*" See, <https://www.rootsmetals.com/blogs/news/what-is-judaism-actually> to learn more. Perhaps, and ironically, a misunderstanding of who Jews are and what Judaism is, has led the Board of Education to consider eliminating Section B.**

In addition, antisemitism is a rising problem in the United States, and is statistically, the basis of the majority of religion-base hate crimes. This past year saw an abundance of issues at University of Vermont. Vermont synagogues have crash barriers, hire armed security, and install bullet-proof glass in their buildings in response to rising concerns.

Further, both in America and internationally, Jews have historically been kept from many arenas of public life. Jews were prohibited from buying homes in many neighborhoods and still face obstacles. Jews were kept from practicing at hospitals and still face hostile environments. Jews were excluded from private clubs and still are. Jews routinely decide to live in certain neighborhoods because they know their kids are not safe in others. Systemic discrimination still concentrates Jews in fields where our advancement isn't dependent on others.

Vermont educators should want Vermont children to learn about the Jewish American experience, understanding Judaism as the ethno-religion that it is. Leaving this important ethnic minority out of the curriculum feeds into further antisemitism, racism, and hate. You of all people know that education is key to understanding one another. Vermont students must learn about Jews and Jewish history to further their

understanding about America's history and its relationship to ethnic minorities. The White House has issued the [National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism. Pillar 1](#) of that strategy reads, "Increase awareness and understanding of antisemitism, including its threat to America, and broaden appreciation of Jewish American heritage."

I do not understand the rationale for removing Jews and antisemitism from the curriculum. I have some insight that organizations from other parts of the United States have taken similar steps to eliminate antisemitism from their curricula and somehow this seeped into Vermont. The irony is not lost on me, as I would argue that the very essence of antisemitism is to pretend that antisemitism does not exist, that the Jewish American experience can be glossed over and thus be eliminated from the curriculum.

For the reasons above, and others that I have not discussed, please ensure that you include the Jewish people in the definition of Ethnic Groups in Section B.

Sincerely,  
Daphne Moritz, Quechee, Vermont  
Member, Shir Shalom, Woodstock, Vermont

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