TO:
State Board of Education

FROM: Neil Odell

RE:
Public Comments - Rule Series 2000 Proposed Changes

DATE: October 3, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the Education Quality Standards. My name is Neil Odell. I am a member of the Norwich School Board and I also serve as President of the Board of Directors of the Vermont School Boards Association. I am here today to provide public comments on behalf of the VSBA.

The VSBA supports the changes throughout the Education Quality Standards that focus on providing equitable, anti-racist, culturally responsive, anti-discriminatory and inclusive educational opportunities for all students. These are important changes for the future of Vermont's students and, as the Act 1 Working Group recommended, should be applicable to all publicly funded students in Vermont whether they attend a public or a private school.

I have struggled to understand the State Board's decision to exempt private schools from the proposed Education Quality Standards. All of Vermont's publicly funded students deserve the same equitable, anti-racist, culturally responsive, anti-discriminatory and inlcusive education experience. At best, this was an oversight - one easily remedied by creating a single set of standards applicable to all publicly funded students. At worst, it creates a separate and unequal system that sets a lower bar for the instruction of Vermont students attending private schools with public funds. Even if the Board created two identical sets of standards, that action would explicitly create an environment that encourages future divergence and sends a message to students that those attending private schools are considered different and not worthy of the same quality of education provided to their peers in public school.

The VSBA strongly encourages the State Board to adopt a single set of standards that would apply to all of Vermont's publicly funded students.

Thank you,
Neil Odell
Norwich School Board
President, Vermont School Boards Association