



# INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE TO VERMONT STATE ETHNIC STUDIES STANDARDS FRAMEWORK FOR THE VERMONT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION 6-30-2023

## INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Act 1 Working Group (hereafter, "Working Group"), we respectfully submit the "**Vermont State Ethnic Studies Standards Framework**" (hereafter, "Standards Framework"), which was unanimously endorsed on Thursday, June 25, 2023.

This submission, like the previous one, is mandated by Act 1 (2019), which empowered the Working Group to: *review and recommend updates and additional standards to the State Board of Education, ensuring the recognition of the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups.*

To provide some context, the Standards Framework is the result of extensive deliberations, public comments, and work products over nearly four years. Notably, it was informed by a comprehensive draft of revisions to **Rule 2000, the Vermont Education Quality Standards Manual of Rules and Practices (EQS)**, submitted to the State Board of Education in April, 2022, and after additional review and amendments, passed by the State Board in May, 2023.

In 2021, Act 66 granted the Agency of Education the authority to engage a contractor with special expertise to assist the Working Group in developing recommendations for updating educational standards to fully acknowledge the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic and social groups. In January, 2023, the Working Group had the privilege of entering into a service agreement with **Community Responsive Education (CRE)** to provide critical research and substantial assistance in the conceptualization and writing of a Standards Framework. CRE was selected as our partner in this endeavor due to its nationally recognized expertise and experience in supporting school districts and educators in the field of Ethnic Studies. The contributions of the CRE team were invaluable to our success.



## OUR CONTRACT WITH CRE

As mentioned above, this past January, the Agency of Education finalized the contract with CRE to support the Working Group in designing and developing an Ethnic Studies Standards Framework for Vermont's Educational Content Standards for Pre-K through Grade 12. The contract spanned six months (January - June, 2023) and involved consultation with a writing team appointed by the Working Group.

The contract outlined the following objectives for the contractor:

- Review and analyze ways to embed an ethnic studies framework and criteria in the Educational Content Standards, PreK through Grade 12, with a focus on increasing cultural competency among students.
- Increase attention to and promote critical thinking regarding the history, contribution, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;
- Commit schools to eradicating any racial bias in their curriculum, and to provide, across school curriculum, content and methods that enable students to explore safely questions of identity, race equality, and racism; and
- Ensure that the basic curriculum and extracurricular programs are welcoming to all students and take into account parental concerns about religion or culture.

The deliverables from the Contractor were:

- A complete review of Vermont's Educational Standards through the lens of Act 1 (2019);
- A proposal outlining ways that Vermont can embed an ethnic studies framework and criteria in the Educational Content Standards, PreK through Grade 12.

CRE was also tasked with "advising the Act 7 Working Group's School Board Policies Subcommittee in its process of developing recommendations to enhance existing local board policies or propose new ones that impact standards for student performance and curriculum in alignment with the Ethnic Studies Framework, PreK through Grade 12."

The CRE team, based in California, consisted of Professor Allyson Tintiango-Cubales and public-school educators Samia Shoman and Aimee Riechel.



## OUR COLLABORATIVE PROCESS WITH CRE

The Working Group recognized the importance of an inclusive collaborative process and took significant steps to ensure the highest quality in the development of the Standards Framework. To this end, we established a "Framework Subcommittee" that was commonly referred to as the "Writing Group." It consisted of four individuals selected for their expertise, dedication to the project, and commitment to the successful implementation of the Standards Framework:

- **Cynthia Reyes**, a professor of Education and Associate Dean at the University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services;
- **Michael Martin**, Executive Director of the Rowland Foundation, former Curriculum Director, and the representative to the Working Group of the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association;
- **Mark Hage**, co-chairperson of the Working Group and facilitator of its Education Quality Standards Committee; and
- **Amanda Garces**, chairperson of the Working Group and Director of Policy, Education and Outreach at the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

The Writing Group engaged intensely with CRE from the outset. The Standards Framework evolved over multiple iterations, and each version was shared with the Working Group at its meetings. This open and inclusive process allowed for robust discussions, questions, and public comment, and enabled the integration of diverse perspectives. We express our sincere gratitude to the Working Group members for their active participation and contributions, with a special note of thanks to Cynthia Reyes and Michael Martin for their many hours of exceptional service to the Writing Group.

Recognizing the significance of external input, we also sought feedback from trusted educators and advisors outside the Working Group who have been unwavering supporters of our mission and share a strong commitment to advancing Ethnic Studies. Their insights and contributions were instrumental in shaping the Framework. We extend our deep appreciation to these individuals as well.

It is crucial to emphasize that most of the commentary received during this collaborative process came from organizational representatives appointed to the Working Group under Act 1 (2019). Our research, discussions, and writing benefitted



immensely from the perspectives and hard work of the Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals' Association, the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, the Vermont-National Education Association, the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, Outright Vermont, and the community members appointed by the Vermont Education Justice Coalition.

On June 25, the Standards Framework received unanimous approval by the Working Group members who were present. This included a call to share all the feedback received during the conceptualization and drafting of the Standards Framework from sources inside and outside the Working Group. This body of commentary is found in [via this link](#).

While we acknowledge that time constraints limited our ability to seek public comment beyond a small, trusted group, we are fully committed to transparency and inclusivity. As the Standards Framework progresses towards formal consideration, we eagerly anticipate and welcome a spirited, open, and enriching dialogue on the document. We recognize the importance of engaging with a broad range of stakeholders and perspectives to ensure that the Standards Framework reflects the values and needs of Vermont schools and communities.

In conclusion, we made significant efforts to build a collaborative, transparent, and mutually respectful process with CRE and others, to ensure that the Standards Framework captured multiple perspectives and was grounded to relevant research. Once more, we are grateful for the contributions of all who were involved in this project and look forward to continuing the dialogue and engaging with a wider audience as the Standards Framework moves forward under the auspices of the State Board of Education.





## COMPONENTS OF THE STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

The Standards Framework comprises eight sections:

1. Acknowledgements
2. Introduction: Background and Content
3. Vermont State I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Standards Framework: Student Standards
4. Pedagogical Commitments
5. Crosswalk with Other State Standards
6. Assessments & Potential Summative Experiences
7. Guidelines for Ethnic Studies Implementation
  - Teacher Preparation & Support
  - District/School Readiness & Sustainability
8. Resources and Suggested Materials

The Standards Framework, fundamentally, is anchored in the principles and practice of "**transformative solidarity**." Transformative solidarity is defined as the conceptual and ethical foundation of an educational system that celebrates the histories and cultures of students, school staff, families, and local communities. It emphasizes sharing and generating knowledge, particularly of groups that have been historically and contemporarily persecuted, marginalized, or silenced. Transformative solidarity recognizes the interconnectedness of movements toward knowledge and freedom and requires deep relationships based on mutual respect, healing, and a collective effort to change discriminatory and oppressive systems.

The Standards Framework stipulates that local schools and communities will commit to rigorously studying the histories and contributions of **Ethnic Studies Groups**, with the objective of collectively building a just, inclusive, anti-racist, and democratic Vermont. Building on the definition of "Ethnic Studies" in the revised EQS Manual, "Ethnic Studies Groups" refers specifically to: "Black, Indigenous (with a special focus on the Indigenous People of Vermont, the Abenaki, Mahican, Pennacook, Pocomtuc, and others), Asian Americans, Latinas/os/xs/e, and additional People of Color."

The Standards Framework is grounded to four "**I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Domains**," which encompass Identity Development, Resisting Racism, Interconnectedness, and Social Responsibility.



Each domain specifies academic competencies, followed by detailed explanations of their relevance to pedagogical commitments, Ethnic Studies' curricular content, and student assessments (formative and summative). The examples provided in the Standards Framework are not exhaustive or prescriptive, highlighting the importance of local initiative, collaboration, and leadership in implementing Ethnic Studies tailored to the specific context of each school district and community.

The concluding section of the Framework emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation and support, as well as school district readiness and sustainability. It accents the vital role of educational leadership in implementing and sustaining Ethnic Studies, the importance of safe, inclusive environments for all students, and the need for well-resourced programs, high expectations in teacher preparation, and quality curriculum.

The Standards Framework, consistent with the revised EQS Manual, states that school districts must provide direct support time, material resources, and funding to ensure effective implementation of Ethnic Studies. School districts should also work collaboratively with students and families to ensure that curriculum development is community responsive. Additionally, appropriate evaluative procedures should be instituted to assess school and student progress with Ethnic Studies in conformance with the Education Quality Standards.

In line with the Vermont Leadership Standards, the Standards Framework calls on schools to:

- Provide the capacity for resourcing and sustaining Ethnic Studies through intentional recruitment and retention of a trained professional to coordinate Ethnic Studies initiatives in school districts.
- Partner with other educational research entities also involved in Ethnic Studies work (e.g., Agency of Education, universities, colleges) for intentional mentoring and renewal work.
- Promote renewal and accountability among teachers with professional development initiatives that foster critical examination of potential barriers to student's academic, social, and cultural growth.
- Support and promote teacher professional growth in self-learning and reflection.

These support systems and resources aim to ensure a comprehensive and effective implementation of the Standards Framework in Vermont.



## CONCLUSION

On behalf of the Working Group, we look forward to engaging with the State Board on the proposed Standards Framework. The Board's perspectives and input are valued by the Working Group, and as demonstrated by our previous interactions on the revised EQS Manual, we remain dedicated to providing support and assistance over the course of your deliberative process on the Standards Framework. With respect to the last point, when the mandate of the Working Group expires at the end of August, a smaller Technical Working Group will be established in accordance with statute H.467. This body, we believe, will be instrumental in ensuring a comprehensive and knowledgeable review of the Standards Framework when it comes before the State Board or is raised in other forums. Mr. Hage and I will be members, along with others from the original Working Group, and we kindly request that the State Board inform us of specific areas or aspects where the technical group's counsel or additional information from its sources will be useful and clarifying.

We extend our gratitude to the State Board for its commitment and contributions to educational progress in our state, and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and implementation of a comprehensive Ethnic Studies Standards Framework.

Amanda Lucia Garces (Chair) and Mark Hage (Co-Chair)  
Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Advisory Working Group

