



April 20, 2022

VIA EMAIL

Dr. Daniel French
Secretary of Education
Vermont Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620

Oliver Olsen
Chair, State Board of Education
Vermont Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620

Re: Act 1 Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group Recommendations

Secretary French and Chair Olsen:

Jewish Communities of Vermont (“JCVT”) enthusiastically supports Act 1 (2019) (“Act 1”) and the goals of (i) increasing cultural competency and attention to the history, contributions, and perspectives of diverse ethnic groups and (ii) fighting bigotry in the classroom. Members of JCVT’s Antisemitism Task Force were involved with the development of the initial legislation and have been attending many of the meetings held by the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group (the “Working Group”) created pursuant to Act 1.

However, as 35 leaders of Vermont’s Jewish community, including 19 Rabbis and Cantors representing every corner of Vermont, we have concerns about the recommended changes (the “Recommendations”) to Series 2000 (Education Quality Standards) of the Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices that your department will soon be receiving from the Working Group.

In addition to our concerns with the substance of the Recommendations, we are also concerned about the approach that the Working Group has taken to implement Act 1 and with the make-up of the Working Group itself. What we outline below is not exhaustive, but illustrates some of the problems we have seen thus far.

The Working Group’s approach has marginalized Jewish Vermonters, and, in its Recommendations, the Working Group has ignored the Legislature’s express wish that the Working Group consider “groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.”¹

¹ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (b)(1)(B).

We request that the State Board of Education: (i) revise or reject the Working Group’s Recommendations, which disregard the specific intent of the Legislature and (ii) recommend to the Legislature that the State Board of Education should create a new Working Group that reflects the broader interest of Vermonters and is willing to properly implement the goals of Act 1.

I. The Working Group’s Recommendations disregard the Legislature’s definition of Ethnic Groups and should be rejected

JCVT has worked in good faith to partner with the Working Group throughout its work, with members of JCVT’s Antisemitism Task Force regularly attending the Working Group’s meetings and providing input on the Working Group’s effort through the public comment process.² Today, we find that several key concepts from Act 1 have been omitted from the Recommendations and that the clear intent of the Legislature has not been followed, most notably the disregard for the way the Legislature defined “Ethnic Groups.”

In Act 1, the Legislature clearly laid out the duties of the Working Group. The Working Group was expected to review and recommend changes to the “standards for student performance adopted by the State Board of Education”³ and “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.”⁴

In both cases, the law required that the Working Group consider “ethnic groups” in various ways. With respect to the State Board of Education’s standards for student performance, the Working Group was asked to:

- “(1) . . . review standards for student performance, . . . recommend to the State Board updates and additional standards to recognize fully the history, contributions and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups. These recommended additional standards shall be designed to:
 - “ . . . (B) increase attention to the history, contribution and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups . . .
 - “(C) promote critical thinking regarding the history, contributions and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups . . .”⁵

And with respect to State statutes, State Board rules, and school district and supervisory union policies that concern or impact standard for student performance or curriculum, the Legislature was no less clear. Unlike the standards, the Legislature said that the Working Group “may review” such materials, and the State Board “may recommend” to the Legislature “changes with the following goals:

- “(A) ensuring that schools:
 - “(i) promote critical thinking regarding the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;
 - “(ii) 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
 - “(iii) facilitate a welcoming environment for all students while taking into account parental concerns about bias or exclusion of ethnic groups or social groups; and

² Copies of JCVT’s letters to the Working Group are attached as Exhibit A.

³ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(1).

⁴ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(2).

⁵ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(1).

“(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.”⁶

Act 1 unambiguously defined the “ethnic groups” that the Legislature tasked the Working Group with considering in its recommendations:

“(1) “Ethnic groups” means:

“(A) nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent; and

“(B) groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.”

The Working Group simply chose to ignore the second prong this definition, which means they ignored a fundamental component of the Legislation and the Legislature’s goals. Despite our repeated engagement with the Working Group, the result is that the Recommendations ignore Jews, failing to consider the needs of Jewish students in its analysis of student performance standards and failing all students by refusing to consider Jewish people in its Recommendations. This occurred despite our repeated efforts to make the Working Group aware of our concerns, despite the Legislature’s specific citation of antisemitism in Act 1⁷ and despite the only continued instances of antisemitism seen across the state since Act 1 was passed.⁸

We are dismayed by the Working Group’s willful ignorance of these issues, its refusal to consider our comments and its disregard for the text of Act 1. However, the Legislature only empowered the Working Group to make recommendations to the State Board of Education. It is the State Board’s obligation to consider the recommendations, but it is up to the State Board to consider which recommendations it wishes to adopt. It is our hope that the State Board will acknowledge the failure of the Working Group to fulfill its obligations, and will reject or materially revise the Working Group’s prejudiced Recommendations.

II. The State Board of Education should support the creation of a new Working Group that will properly implement the goals of Act I

We have remained engaged with the Working Group throughout their process in the hope that our concerns would be addressed. In addition to attending many of the Working Group’s meetings as representatives of Vermont’s Jewish community and members of the public, we also submitted two letters to the Working Group in order to be precise in our comments and to gain clarity around the Working Group’s decision to ignore portions of what Act 1 required of it.

Unfortunately, recent events have made clear that the Working Group’s leadership had no interest in hearing what we had to say, and in fact demeaned our efforts in communication with the rest of the Working Group. In sharing only our most recent letter to the Working Group, right before the Working Group voted on the

⁶ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (g)(2).

⁷ Act 1 (2019): Subdivision (a)(5).

⁸ There have been several reported instances of antisemitism in Vermont since the enactment of Act 1. For example:

- (a) In December 2019, antisemitic signs were founded posted on multiple occasions in St. Albans ([Anti-Semitic signs found posted in St. Albans \(wcax.com\)](#));
- (b) In September 2021, a Nazi flag was flown by a resident of Townshend during the Jewish High Holidays ([Anti-Semitic incident in Vermont town leaves residents outraged | Israel National News - Arutz Sheva](#)); and
- (c) In February 2022, a study showed that there had been 58 reported cases of antisemitism at UVM in 2021, by far the most of any college in North America ([Anti-Semitic incident in Vermont town leaves residents outraged | Israel National News - Arutz Sheva](#)).

final Recommendations, Amanda Garces, the chair of the Working Group, stated in an email to the entire Working Group:

“We have provided a process that has been open, transparent and fair to all individuals. It is disappointing that while members of JCVT were in attendance at each one of our meetings, including the sub-committee meetings, none provided any feedback during the public comment period. We must now use precious time at our next meeting to address these issues. I will make this letter public for transparency.”

We are concerned that Ms. Garces, Working Group Vice Chair Mark Hage, and other Working Group members have ignored JCVT and our concerns about the Working Group’s Recommendations because of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel bias, as evidenced by their and their activist groups’ histories of anti-Israel advocacy and outspoken and clear bias against Jewish organizations.

The majority of the Working Group was appointed by Ms. Garces, through the activist group the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont (the “EJC”), which was not named in Act 1. Despite its name and stated mission, much of the EJC’s social media presence focuses on spreading vehemently anti-Israel messaging and the tone and tenor of its social media posts are biased against Israel and Jewish organizations.⁹ EJC has posted approvingly about the use of one-sided, anti-Israel curriculum in other states that seeks to delegitimize the Jewish state.

Additionally, the EJC has been raising money for its private work by citing Ms. Garces’s public work for the state, work that the Legislature funded – over \$19,000 for per diems and expense reimbursements plus another \$50,000 that Ms. Garces requested – and the Agency of Education supported administratively.

Vice Chair Marc Hage is a published author of anti-Israel and pro-BDS hate,¹⁰ which many consider antisemitic.¹¹ He is a long-time leader of Vermonters for Justice in Palestine (VTJP), and he and Working Group member Asma Elhuni were leaders behind the attempted BDS resolution in Burlington that saw an unprecedented amount of antisemitic bullying on display at the City Council meeting.¹² According to recent news reports and Ms. Elhuni’s own social media, Ms. Elhuni lives and works New Hampshire, not Vermont.¹³ Ms. Elhuni also has a history of vehemently anti-Israel statements on social media, including using the phrase “From the river to the sea Palestine will be free,”¹⁴ which the American Jewish Committee has labeled antisemitic.¹⁵

⁹ A screenshot of a small portion of EJC’s problematic and biased social media posts are attached as Exhibit B.

¹⁰ See <https://mondoweiss.net/author/mhage/> and <https://vtdigger.org/tag/mark-hage/>

¹¹ The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement dehumanizes Israelis, undermines peace efforts by opposing Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, and seeks to end Israel’s existence. Examples of this include:

- (a) “We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine” – [Omar Barghouti, co-founder of BDS](#)
- (b) “The real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel,” – [As’ad Abukhalil, leading BDS activist](#)
- (c) “Bringing down Israel really will benefit everyone in the world, and everyone in society,” – [Lara Kiswani, BDS activist and leader in the National Liberated Ethnic Studies Coalition](#)
- (d) “The ‘Jewish nation’...needs to be dismantled.” -- [Hatem Bazian, BDS leader and UC Berkeley Department of Ethnic Studies lecturer](#) <https://twitter.com/canarymission/status/1249865067891433473/photo/1>

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has recognized the BDS Movement as hateful, saying: “not to appreciate that there is some level of antisemitism around the world involved in [BDS], I think would be a mistake” ([Source](#)) and “It is true that some criticism of Israel can cross the line into antisemitism, especially when it denies the right of self-determination to Jews, or when it plays into conspiracy theories about outsized Jewish power.” ([source](#))

¹² <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/OffMessage/archives/2021/09/14/at-heated-meeting-burlington-city-council-withdraws-bds-resolution>

¹³ See <https://www.concordmonitor.com/Granite-State-News-Collaborative-41163377> and <https://twitter.com/asmaelhuni>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/asmaelhuni/status/1459566848215863296>

¹⁵ <https://www.ajc.org/translatehate/From-the-River-to-the-Sea>

In May 2021, Ms. Garces (for EJC), Mr. Hage (for VTJP), and Ms. Elhuni (for Rights and Democracy) were featured speakers at VTJP's "Rally and March for Palestine Nakba¹⁶ Day May 15th, 2021" co-sponsored by EJC, JVP, Red Banner Anti-Imperialist Collective; Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL); Party of Communists USA and others.

Simply put, we are extremely concerned that given the extreme anti-Israel sentiment of the Working Group's leadership and their extensive history of activism opposed by the organized Jewish community, our comments have not been taken seriously and, as a result, the Recommendations have ignored Jewish history and the needs of Jewish students.

In order to restore faith in this process, we encourage the State Board of Education to work with the Legislature to reconstitute the Working Group, and to ensure that any such group is open to engaging with Vermonters from all backgrounds and is willing and ready to implement the important goals of Act 1.

We look forward to engaging with you on these matters and thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tobie Weisman, Director, JCVT
Ted Molnar, President, JCVT
Yoram Samets, Chair, JCVT Antisemitism Task Force

Cc: Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary, Agency of Education
Emily Simmons, General Counsel, Agency of Education
Jennifer Deck Samuelson, Vice Chair, State Board of Education
Patrick Brown, Member, State Board of Education
Kim Gleason, Member, State Board of Education
Tammy Kolbe, Member, State Board of Education
Lyle Jepson, Member, State Board of Education
Tom Lovett, Member, State Board of Education
Gabrielle Lucci, Member, State Board of Education
Jenna O'Farrell, Member, State Board of Education
Angelita Peña, Member, State Board of Education

¹⁶ "Nakba," which is Arabic for catastrophe, refers here to the creation of the State of Israel. According to the Anti-Defamation League, "Some Palestinian politicians, writers and commentators use Nakba Day to insinuate that the very existence of Israel is a catastrophe and to question the legitimacy of Israel as the Jewish national homeland." <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/nakba>

Exhibit A

JCVT's Letters to the Working Group



March 7, 2022

Re: Act 1 Ethnic and Social Standards Advisory Working Group's Draft EQS

Dear Amanda Garces, Chair, Mark Hage, Vice Chair, and the full Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group,

We write to you as leaders of Vermont's Jewish community who enthusiastically support Act 1's call for students in our state to learn about the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups in their classrooms.

We urge your Working Group, however, to reject the draft Educational Quality Standards (EQS) that Working Group Chair Amanda Garces and Vice Chair Mark Hage presented at your February 17, 2022 meeting because this draft fails its most fundamental task -- to reflect the Vermont Legislature's Act 1 directives.

We ask that you review this and our September 30, 2021 letters and, at your March 17 meeting, and request that the draft EQS be revised to:

1. Include Act 1's exact language at a minimum:

In the definition of "Ethnic Groups" -- "Ethnic groups' means: (A) nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicanx, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent; and (B) groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide." (Section 1(b)(1))

In the definition of "Ethnic Studies" -- "Ethnic studies' means the instruction of students in prekindergarten through grade 12 in the historical contributions and perspectives of Ethnic Groups and Social Groups." (capitalization added) (Section 1(b)(2))

2. Remove "and outside" from the definition of Ethnic Studies so it comports with Act 1 which is limited to Ethnic Groups "in the United States." (Section 1(b)(1) and above)

3. Capitalize "Ethnic Studies" and "Ethnic Groups" throughout the EQS to denote that they are defined terms.

Background

In May 2020, without legislative authorization, Vice Chair Mark Hage announced that "due to the scope and complexity of the Working Group's duties" he would be delegating the Act 1 Ethnic and Social Standards Advisory Working Group's (Working Group) "essential duties" to a subcommittee. [Act 1 Advisory Group Draft Meeting Minutes_05_26_20.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#) Vice Chair Hage and Chair Amanda Garces led the subcommittee which revised the EQS.

On September 30, 2021, Jewish Communities of Vermont sent Chair Garces a letter addressed to the Working Group setting out our recommended changes with a request that our letter be shared with the full Working

Group. Instead, Chair Garces embedded our suggestions in a 52-page document and tagged them "JCVT." By doing so, she hid from her subcommittee (i) the name of our organization, (ii) the 18 rabbis and community leaders who signed our letter, (iii) our explanation that being Jewish is both a religion and ethnicity, and (iv) our concern about antisemitism. She did not share our letter with her subcommittee and the Working Group. She also did not share with the Working Group the 52-page document that contained our suggestions.

Before the subcommittee's January 2022 meeting, Jewish Communities of Vermont wrote to Chair Garces and Vice Chair Hage again, asking them to raise our concerns during this meeting, noting that their subcommittee skipped our suggestions in December, and asked again that our letters be shared with the subcommittee and full Working Group. They did neither.

Ultimately, their subcommittee rejected each one of our substantive recommendations.

On February 17, 2022, Chair Garces and Vice Chair Hage's subcommittees' draft EQS was presented to the full Working Group with Chair Garces informing you that her and Vice Chair Hage's subcommittee ran out of time on this project. The Working Group also ran out of time and did not discuss the draft EQS. Prepared for this eventuality, both Chair Garces and Vice Chair Hage advised the Working Group that instead of a public discussion there will be private one-on-one meetings with you and representatives of Garces' activist group Education Justice Coalition* before March 9 so that the Working Group can approve the 26-page draft EQS without hesitation at your March 17 meeting (they'll cover what "we need you to really understand" (Hage) so that you can approve the EQS "with your heart and soul" (Garces)).

Chair Garces and Vice Chair Hage did not meet the EQS legislative deadline; the Working Group's recommendations were to be delivered to the State Board of Education by December 31, 2021.

Vermont Law

The draft EQS that Working Group Chair Garces and Vice Chair Hage are recommending, in essence, re-writes Act 1 by leaving out its foundational elements. For example, the draft EQS definition of "Ethnic Groups" omits "people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicax, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent" as well as "groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide."

Act 1 tasks your Working Group with "recommend[ing] to the State Board...standards to recognize fully the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups" that must be designed to, among other things:

- "increase attention to" and "promote critical thinking regarding" the "history, contribution, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups," 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 Vermont Legislature is clear which "ethnic groups" are, at a minimum, to be incorporated into the EQS and so Vermont's PK-12 classrooms:

- "nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicax, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent," and

- "groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide."

It defines "Ethnic Studies" as the instruction of PK-12 students "in the historical contributions and perspectives of ...ethnic groups and social groups."

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/ACTS/ACT001/ACT001%20As%20Enacted.pdf> (2019) and

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/ACTS/ACT066/ACT066%20As%20Enacted.pdf> (2021)

Jewish Americans

As we explained in our attached September 30 letter which Chair Garces did not share with you, Jewish Americans, most of whom immigrated to the United States in the last century, are a multi-racial and multi-ethnic religious group sharing a common ancestry, indigenous liturgical language, traditions and histories of oppression.

Jewish people arrived in the United States from all corners of the world including the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, with the United States one of the world's largest Middle Eastern Jewish diasporic communities.

A racially diverse people -- Asian, Black, Latino, and White to name a few -- Jews of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities share a culture and language developed by our ancestors more than 3,000 years ago.

Sadly, we also share a long history of persecution and genocide, most recently the Holocaust 80 years ago, where 6 million Jews were murdered because of their race, and the forced exile of almost a million Jews from North Africa and the Middle East making them dispossessed refugees after that.

Discrimination against Jews continues in America today. While only half of our nation knows that antisemitism exists according to a recent American Jewish Committee survey, sixty-four percent (64%) of our nation's religious-based hate-crimes are directed at the 2% Jewish population making it the most prevalent in that category and accounting for 9% of all hate crimes in our nation.

Moving Forward

We hope that at your March 17, 2022 meeting you will insist that the EQS define Ethnic Studies and Ethnic Groups as they are defined in the law which we set forth above so that the EQS envelops, at the very least, all the groups the Vermont Legislature has decided that children need to learn about including those of "Middle Eastern descent" and "groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide."

Thank you for your careful consideration.

Rabbi Tobie Weisman, Director, Jewish Communities of Vermont

Cantor Scott Buckner, Clergy & Spiritual Leader, Israel Congregation of Manchester

Rabbi Howard Cohen, Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Beth El, Bennington

Rabbi Michael M. Cohen, Rabbi Emeritus, Israel Congregation of Manchester

Rabbi Asher Crispe and Sara Esther Crispe

Rabbi David Edleson, Temple Sinai, South Burlington

Rabbi David Fainsilber, Jewish Community of Greater Stowe

Rabbi Ilene Haigh, Congregation Shir Shalom, Woodstock

Rabbi Amita Jarmon, Brattleboro Jewish Community

Rabbi Eliyahu Junik, Chabad, Burlington

Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum, Bethlehem Hebrew Congregation

Rabbi Shana Margolin, Montpelier

Rabbi Yitzchok Raskin, Chabad, Burlington

Rabbi Jan Salzman, Congregation Ruach haMaqom, Burlington

Rabbi Ira Schiffer, Rabbi Emeritus Middlebury College

Rabbi Ellie Shemtov, Rutland Jewish Center

Rabbi Ariello Shimko, PJ Library

Rabbi Amy Joy Small, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington

Cantor Steve Zeidenberg, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington

Barry Cohen, President, Rutland Jewish Community

Jan Feldman, PhD., Professor, University of Vermont

Ethan Felson, Executive Director, A Wider Bridge

K. Heidi Fishman, MA, EdD, VTHM Board Member

Phyllis Forbes, PhD., President, Congregation Shir Shalom, Woodstock

James Grossman, M.Ed. Middle School Special Educator, Burlington

Susan Leff, President, Temple Sinai, South Burlington

Steve Levine, MD, President, Jewish Community of Greater Stowe

Mike Kanarick, JCVT Antisemitism Task Group, Burlington

Jessica Meller, JCVT Antisemitism Task Group, Shelburne

Ted Molnar, President, Jewish Communities of Vermont (JCVT), Rutland

Laura Nugent, Ed.D., Champlain College, Burlington

Jeff Potash, President, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington

Yoram Samets, JCVT Antisemitism Task Group/Chair, Charlotte

Debora Steinerman, President, Vermont Holocaust Memorial (VTHM), Jeffersonville

Alan E. Steinweiss, Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies, University of Vermont

Matt Vogel, Executive Director – Hillel at the University of Vermont

Sarah Zweigst, Program Director, Beth Jacob Synagogue, Montpelier



September 30, 2021

Dear ACT 1 Ethnic and Social Standards Advisory Working Group,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the revised Education Quality Standards (EQS) draft dated 8/30/2021. We support your work and believe strongly in creating educational standards that welcomes and meets the needs for all our Vermont children. On behalf of Jewish Communities of Vermont (JC VT), we are submitting the attached feedback. JC VT is a non-denominational organization that seeks to encourage education about and connection with Jewish Americans in our state.

Our comments are focused on the inclusion of Jews in America in your work -- their diversity as well as historical and current experiences -- as contemplated by the Vermont legislature (Act 1 (2019)).

Antisemitism remains the most prevalent source of religious-based discrimination in the United States per [FBI statistics](#) released this month accounting for 9% of all hate crimes (and 64% of all religious-based hate crimes) for the Jewish 2% of our nation's population. Being Jewish is both a religion and an ethnicity and thus needs to be recognized in diversity and marginalization curriculum.

Please confirm receipt. We expect you will present all our feedback to the full subcommittee and working group. Please advise us in advance of all subcommittee and full committee meetings in which suggested changes will be discussed.

Also, please keep us apprised of each draft as the process proceeds so we may respond in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tobie Weisman, Director, Jewish Communities of Vermont

Rabbi Amy Small, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington

Rabbi David Edleson, Temple Sinai, South Burlington

Rabbi Yitzchok Raskin, Chabad, Burlington

Rabbi Eliyahu Junik, Chabad, Burlington

Rabbi Binyamin Murray, Chabad, Middlebury

Rabbi David Fainsilber, Jewish Community of Greater Stowe

Rabbi Howard A Cohen, Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Beth El, Bennington

Debora Steinerman, President, Vermont Holocaust Memorial, Jeffersonville
Ted Molnar, President, Jewish Communities of Vermont, Rutland
Alan E. Steinweis, Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies, University of Vermont
Barbara Kohn Saxe, Literacy Specialist, Retired, Harwood Union Middle/High School
James Grossman, M.Ed., Middle School Special Educator, Burlington
Jan Feldman, PhD., Professor, University of Vermont
Laura Nugent, Ed.D., Champlain College
Mike Kanarick, member and former Executive Director, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington
P. Jeffery Potash, PhD., Treasurer, Friends of the Lost Mural, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington
Rick Gordon, PhD., Founding Director Compass School, Brattleboro
Tracy Rubman, M.Ed, Special Education, Burlington School District
Yoram Samets, JCVT antisemitism task group/chair, Charlotte
Jessica Mellers, JCVT antisemitism task group, Shelburne
Norma Levy, JCVT antisemitism task group, Rutland

Proposed Revisions to VT Ethnic Studies Working Group’s
State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices
Series 2000-Education Quality Standards

(8.30.21 draft)

2110 Statement of Purpose

Revision 1

The third paragraph shall be amended by

- Changing “or” to “and” between “bias” and “discrimination”
- Adding “national origin” between “religion,” and “and non-citizenship status.”

“In addition to the non-discriminatory protections in Section 2113, these rules strictly prohibit bias and discrimination against any student pursuing an education or participating in the general life or activities of a public school or an approved independent school as a result of, or based upon, ethnicity, caste, language and linguistic diversity, socio-economic status, religion, national origin, and non-citizenship status.”

Rationale: Adding “national origin” brings forward an omitted protected Federal non-discrimination category set forth in Section 2113 which is also listed in the Education Quality Standard’s definition of “discrimination” to make it clear that the prohibition of bias, as well as discrimination, also applies to a student’s nation of origin. (See also 13 V.S.A. Section 1455 (Hate-Motivated Crimes) which applies to national origin.)

Revision 2

Subsection (c) shall be amended by adding “religious” between “racial,” and “linguistic.”

“c. the positive and multi-faceted contributions of different social, cultural, racial, religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups to the historical project of nation-building in the United States”

Rationale: Consistent use of terminology.

2114 Definitions

Revision 1

Section 7 (this is the second #7 in the same section beginning “Ethnicity”) shall be amended by:

- Capitalizing “Ethnic Groups” and
- Replacing “countries” with “nations.”

Rationale: Consistent use of terminology.

Revision 2

Section 8 shall be amended by:

- Replacing “geographic” with “national.”

- Adding the following at the end: “Ethnic Group also includes:
 - (a) Nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Chicanax, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent, and
 - (b) Groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.”

“Ethnic Group” means a group whose members identify with each other based on certain criteria including a common history, culture, religion, ancestry, language and national origin. Ethnic Group also includes:

(a) Nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Chicanax, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent, and

(b) Groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.”

Rationale: Consistent use of terminology and incorporating the enabling legislation (Act 1, Section 1(b)(1))’s “ethnic group” definition.

Revision 3

The first sentence of Section 9 shall be amended by:

- Replacing “people of color and indigenous cultures” with “Ethnic Groups and Social Groups,”
- Replacing “the historical and contemporary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity (inclusive of Vermont’s first people the Abenaki) with a critical” with “recognizing fully the history and contributions of Ethnic Groups and Social Groups emphasizing critical thinking and focusing”
- Removing “and outside”

“Ethnic Studies’ means interdisciplinary, age- and grade appropriate curricula and programs dedicated to recognizing fully the history and contributions of Ethnic Groups and Social Groups emphasizing critical thinking and focusing on the experiences and perspectives of Ethnic Groups and Social Groups within the United States.”

Rationale:

- Consistent use of terminology.
- Incorporating the enabling legislation (Act 1, Section 1(b)(1))’s language and “ethnic group” definition.
- The number and complexity of topics that can be covered in K-12 Ethnic Studies is vast hence restricting Ethnic Studies to Ethnic Groups within the United States which aligns with Act 1 (2019) directive (defines “Ethnic Group” as “nondominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States.”)
- Similarly, this carries forward Act 1’s desire for students to develop critical thinking skills (“These recommended additional standards shall be designed to...promote critical thinking” and “The State Board may recommend to the General Assembly proposed statutory changes with the following goals: (A) ensuring that schools: (i) promote critical thinking”)

Revision 4

Section 14 shall be amended by capitalizing “Ethnic Groups.”

Note 1

Section 6 specifies “spiritual” as a component of “culture.” Care should be taken to ensure that teachers and curriculum do not violate the US Constitution’s separation of church and state principles i.e. promoting religion in the classroom.

2120.1 Instructional Practices

Revision 1

Capitalize Ethnic Studies in section (f).

2120.5 Curriculum Content

Revision 1

Replace section (e) in its entirety to read as follows: “Ethnic Studies as defined in Section 2114 of this Manual;”

2120.6 Curriculum Coordination

Revision 1

Capitalize Ethnic Studies in the third paragraph.

2120.7 Graduation Requirements

Revision 1

Remove the third paragraph in its entirety.

Rationale: Establishing an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement is beyond the charge of this working group.

2121.1 School Leadership

Revision 1

Capitalize Ethnic Studies in section (d).

2121.3 Needs Based Professional Learning

Revision 1

Capitalize Ethnic Studies in the second paragraph.

Exhibit B

Social media posts from the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont and Asma Elhuni




Ashlee Rubinstein

I completely disagree. This is a really complicated matter, and a principal should not use her influence and power in such a way.

Like Reply 40w



 Author

Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

Ashlee Rubinstein how are you going to educate the students and public at large about the what is happening in Palestine? The US government and the Media are not bringing but the Israelis side of the story, do you think this is right?

Like Reply 40w




Ashlee Rubinstein

Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

I think it's absolutely important to show both sides. That doesn't seem to be what's happening in this group.

Like Reply 40w



 Author

Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

Ashlee Rubinstein we are bringing the silent voices in this group, not only on this subject, but our bigger community. Indigenous communities, Black communities, Latinos communities, refugees, LGPTQA , Disabled community. If you think we have to bring the propaganda that fills the airwaves and print supporting Israel Genocide against Palestinians, I don't see that happening.

Like Reply 40w



Ashlee Rubinstein

Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

I'm sorry, but I cannot support this group if this is how you feel.

Like Reply 40w



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

May 23, 2021 · 🌐

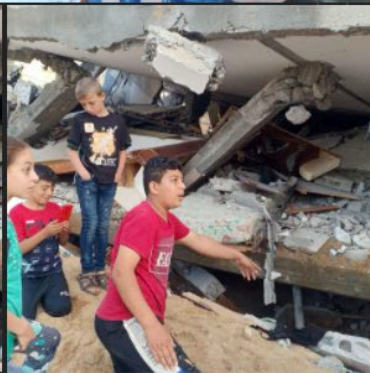


Do NOT CLOSE EYES, ISRAELIS COMMITTING GENOCIDE!
PALESTINIAN CHILDREN ARE THE VICTIMS!



Rana Firdaus ▶ BDS Ongoing Campaigns

May 23, 2021 · 🌐



Wafa News Agency - English ▶ BDS Ongoing Campaigns

May 23, 2021 · 🌐

Photos: Children from #Gaza look for their school books among piles of rubble.



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

November 16, 2021 · 🌐



Vermont's \$6,147,728 yearly allocation of weapons to Israel could be better used to fund:



76 elementary school teachers



4,085 people receiving food assistance



1,057 student receiving a Pell grant



2,593 children receiving healthcare



83 clean energy jobs



US Campaign for
Palestinian Rights

militaryaidtoisrael.org

Vermonters for Justice in Palestine

November 14, 2021 · 🌐

"U.S. taxpayers will give Israel a total of \$38 billion of weapons over ten years (\$3.8 billion each year from 2019 to 2028), according to a 2016 agreement betw... [See more](#)



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

May 11, 2021 · 🌐



Take some time for this.



DECOLONIZEPALESTINE.COM

Palastine 101 | Decolonize Palastine

Welcome to the Decolonize Palastine introductory articles secti...





Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

May 13, 2021 · 🌐



Come out to Battery Park this Saturday at 1:00 and be in solidarity with Palestine. Speakers, food, drums, poetry, and more!



SAT, MAY 15, 2021

Solidarity with Palestine Rally

Battery Park (Burlington, Vermont)

Causes · 195 people



Interested



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

May 15, 2021 · 🌐



1948



2021

Wafic Faour

May 15, 2021 · 🌐

73 years today, our Palestinian NAKBA continue! Silence on crimes against the Palestinian people is crime!



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

June 15, 2021 · 🌐



This how the Democratic state of Israel practices human rights on Palestinian kids, silence on crime is crime!



👍 🙄 3



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

November 5, 2021 · 🌐



Israeli occupation soldiers and Palestinian kid, and they call that Democracy?



👍🙄👎 6

1 Comment 2 Shares



Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

October 30, 2021 · 🌐



Going to school through apartheid walls!

👍👎👤 7

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



Write a comment...

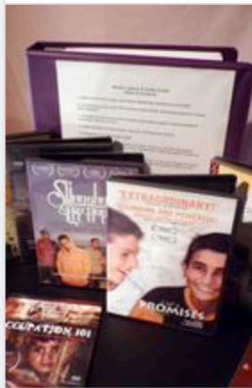


Education Justice Coalition of Vermont

June 25, 2021 · 🌐



<https://palestinett.org/>



PALESTINETT.ORG

Palestine Teaching Trunk

Teaching materials about Palestine and Israel

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



Asma Elhuni @asmaelhuni · Nov 13, 2021

From the River to the Sea Palestine will be Free! A saying created by Palestinians to highlight the continued abuse by Israel towards Palestinians made popular by Palestinians who believe in a one state solution where Jews, Muslims, Christians can live equally in peace. [#NHpolitics](#)



Nooran A. @nooranhamdan · Nov 13, 2021

People don't usually care about [#NHPolitics](#) but currently New Hampshire Democrats are attacking a representative who dared say "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and labeling her antisemitic. She was forced to apologize and is being pressured to resign.

[Show this thread](#)



Asma Elhuni
@asmaelhuni

Reject all who try to link the beautiful faith of Judaism with the colonizing project of Israel. This delegitimizes real anti-semitism that happens. There is an intentional attempt to lump anti-zionism with anti-semitism and we will not tolerate it! [#NHPOLITICS](#)

12:16 PM · Nov 13, 2021 · Twitter Web App



Asma Elhuni @asmaelhuni · May 12



Thank you NH Progressive Party!



Robin W. Vogt @VogtForNH · May 12

Replying to @SenatorHassan



We ask Senator Maggie Hassan to retract her statement concerning the ongoing attacks on the people of Palestine and the continuing atrocities being committed by the Israeli Government. Her statement does not reflect a respect for human rights and dignity and is not in line with the values and priorities of her constituents.

#FreePalestine
The New Hampshire
Progressive Coalition





Asma Elhuni @asmaelhuni · May 16



Jews are making it clear that what's happening to Palestinians is occupation. For the Zionists that are saying our rallies are anti-Semitic my Jewish friends have said your zionism is anti-Semitic

[#FreePalestine](#)



A ...



Asma Elhuni @asmaelhuni · May 16



Ya Allah. The terrorist gov of Israel is unmoved in its killing spree. We must speak out. [@SenatorHassan](#) where the hell is your condemnation now? Your only good at condemning the oppressed people in Palestine. A vote for you is a vote for an oppressor



Osama Gaweesh @osgaweesh · May 16

Literally, #GazaUnderAttak

[Show this thread](#)



1



13



[Show this thread](#)



Asma Elhuni @asmaelhuni · May 12



Let's get her out of office. She is officially a supporter of genocide. This is not a conflict it's an occupation.



Sen. Maggie Hassan @SenatorHassan · May 11

I condemn Hamas' attacks on Israeli citizens — they must stop, and Israel has a right to defend itself. I urge de-escalation before more lives are lost.



1



1



10

