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Subject: Comment on Proposed Revisions to Vermont's Education Quality Standards

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Dear SBE EQS Committee Members,

I am writing to share my comments on the proposed revisions to Vermont's Education Quality Standards. I write as a member of the Jewish community, a resident of Middlesex, a mother of children in the Washington Central Unified Union School District, and a teacher of World History, Sociology and Ethnic Studies at Montpelier High School.

I would like to express my tremendous appreciation for the precision and care that the Act 1 Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group put into preparing the proposed revisions. The clarity of the definitions outlined will be a great service to educators as we discuss policy and curriculum at the school site level. Many of us at the school site level are anticipating the passage of the revised standards to guide us in addressing urgent equity issues in our schools.

I would also like to express my serious concern over proposed changes to these standards to include the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism. In my social studies classroom, we study the development of racist philosophies and their impact throughout history. Similar to the proposed revisions, we work with a broad definition of racism and discrimination that can be applied across historical contexts, geographies and periods. Such an approach allows us to analyze the differences, similarities and connections between different manifestations of racism and how they have been used to reinforce each other. This also allows students to make connections between anti-racist movements throughout history and in doing so unify across diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to address current-day manifestations of inequity in their schools and communities.

On the contrary, an approach that would instead name one form of racism, in this case antisemitism, would have very negative consequences. In exceptionalizing the Jewish experience, it contributes to a dangerous and racist narrative of Jewish otherness, one that is actively engaged by white supremacists today. Meanwhile it would effectively overshadow the countless unnamed forms of ethnic and race based discrimination that have negatively impacted the lives of Vermonters and their ancestors. In doing so, it undermines the ability of groups experiencing oppression to build unity across differences.

Further, adopting the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism, that includes criticism of the Israeli state and Zionist ideology, poses a serious infringement on free speech and academic inquiry. It would effectively silence not only many Jewish Vermonters, including those of Jewish young people in our schools, but also Palestinian and Israeli voices that are critical to any study of this region. Nowhere else in the Education Quality Standards have limitations been placed on critical study of particular countries or histories. Doing so would have a grave impact on social studies education, Jewish people in Vermont, the principles of equity and inclusion this document is designed to uphold.

As a Jewish Vermonter, parent and educator, I urge this committee to pass the proposed revisions as recommended by the Working Group.

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