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Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards: Agency of Education Commentary

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) is dedicated to ensuring every student can benefit from an education that is fair, anti-racist, culturally responsive, inclusive, and free from discrimination, as outlined in the [Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS). However, the AOE doesn't decide on, or require, specific curricula—those decisions are made by each Supervisory Union or District ([EQS 2120.7](#)). Likewise, the Vermont State Board of Education (SBE), not the AOE, is responsible for adopting academic standards for schools to follow.

Background

In 2023, [Vermont's IRIS Ethnic Studies Standards Framework](#) was released which outlines the Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards (p.8-9 in framework document) organized by four domains: Identify Development, Resisting Racism, Interconnectedness, and Social Responsibility (IRIS). Within each domain are competencies, detailing each overarching domain.

The AOE expresses its strong support for the important work that the Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group has done and their continued emphasis on ensuring all voices are represented in this equity work.

Agency of Education Commentary

The Agency of Education conducted an analysis of connections between the Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards and 9-12 SBE adopted standards. There are significant connections to the Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards - both strong and ancillary- to national standards previously adopted by the SBE. The ways Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards competencies would be implemented in each of these subject areas would depend on the curricular decisions of curriculum leaders within a SU/SD. In some disciplines, such as with ELA, the connections that can be made between competencies and SBE-adopted standards would depend more heavily on the creativity and *content* decisions of the curriculum leader. It should be noted that many standards' content indicators in grades 9-12 utilize verbs that allow students to demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking (Analyze, Evaluate) which may not align with those verbs used in the Vermont Ethnic Studies competencies.

A. What Vermont Ethnic Studies competencies have strong connections to SBE-adopted standards?



Some of the competencies within each IRIS domain have greater connections to Vermont SBE-adopted standards than others. The competencies below represent those that content specialists identified closely connected SBE-adopted standards ([American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages](#) (ACTFL) [College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#) (C3), [National Core Arts Standards](#) (NCAS).

- **Identity Development:** Center on the identities, knowledges, histories, and experiences of Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Identify the contributions, cultures, and histories of Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Explore the historical, contemporary, interdependent, and multidimensional nature of identity (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual identity, etc.).

The adopted national standards strongly provide authentic content connections to the above competencies within World Language, Social Studies, Health, Physical Education (PE), the Arts, and Science. Opportunities for English Language Arts (ELA) literacy connections can be made through the selection of reading, writing, speaking, and listening resources, lessons, and units of study.

- **Resisting Racism:** Cultivate systems literacy to understand and change the impact of racism and intersectional forms of oppression on racially marginalized communities.
 - Research the ways that systems have impacted their lives, Ethnic Studies Groups, and Vermont.
 - Examine how systems work to uphold oppression and exclusion (i.e., white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism, classism, institutional and structural racism, colonialism and imperialism, etc.).

The adopted national standards strongly provide authentic content connections to the above competency within World Language, Social Studies, the Arts, and Health. Opportunities for ELA literacy connections can be made through the selection of reading, writing, speaking, and listening resources, lessons, and units of study.

- **Interconnectedness:** Value community cultural wealth and support community actualization.

- Describe the ways that students, families, and communities of color come from generations of peoples who have rich intellectual and cultural traditions.
- Contribute to community actualization and an equitable distribution of power.

The adopted national standards strongly provide authentic content connections to the above competencies within World Language, Social Studies, Health, PE, the Arts, and Science. Opportunities for ELA literacy connections can be made through the selection of reading, writing, speaking, and listening resources, lessons, and units of study.

- **Social Responsibility:** Uplift collective liberation, well-being, and joy.
 - Understand the impact of social movements and the solidarity efforts that fought for the freedom of all peoples, especially for Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Engage in difficult yet humanizing conversations about racism and its intersections with language, class, gender, disability, etc.

The adopted national standards strongly provide authentic content connections to the above competency within World Language, Social Studies, Health, and the Arts. Opportunities for ELA literacy connections can be made through the selection of reading, writing, speaking, and listening resources, lessons, and units of study.

B. Which IRIS competencies do not have a strong connection with SBE-adopted standards?

All IRIS domains have connections to SBE-adopted standards, but some connections may come through curriculum and/or teaching practices as opposed to being linked to learning outcomes. Many of the IRIS competencies find more relevancy as considerations in curriculum design/approach and may be challenging to assess as pure academic standards. While some competencies lend themselves to inclusion within instructional practices. The following list of Ethnic Studies Standard competencies were identified as having connections to teaching practice and curriculum design.

- **Identity Development:** Center the identities, knowledges, histories, experiences of Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Share their lived experiences, their gifts, dreams, stories and languages, indigeneity, immigration journeys, and/or ancestral lineages while honoring the lived experiences of all.

- Value storytelling as a way to foster empathy and to understand the importance of mutual interdependence, relationality, and kinship.
- **Resisting Racism:** Cultivate systems literacy to understand and change the impact of racism and intersectional forms of oppression on racially marginalized communities.
 - Disrupt negative stereotypes and assumptions of Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Develop new humanizing systems that value Ethnic Studies Groups.
- **Interconnectedness:** Value community cultural wealth and support community actualization.
 - Challenge deficit-thinking about Ethnic Studies Groups.
 - Build one’s purpose anchored in an anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, and intercultural solidarity.
- **Social Responsibility:** Uplift collective liberation, well-being, and joy.
 - Acknowledge that we have a social responsibility to address the ways systemic racism, poverty, and intersectional oppressions have caused harm to all communities.
 - Co-create cultural community spaces that center healing (from the effects of historic and contemporary trauma, harm, and toxicity rooted in racism and intersectional forms of oppression) and wellness for dancing, singing, eating, and enjoying nature - as an art of understanding each other’s humanity and our relationship to our earth.

We acknowledge that this analysis reflects the views of content specialists at the Agency of Education and others may find connections that we have not.

Next Steps

The AOE is committed to supporting Vermont K-12 student engagement with the Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards. The AOE has already engaged in efforts to support educational equity in the state through past initiatives such as equity grants and the development of such resources as the [Spotlights on Equity](#) and the [Essential Topics in Sexual Health Education](#). This work requires collaboration among organizations to ensure its impact reaches as many students, schools, and communities as possible. Below are the next steps that the AOE is undertaking to further engage with Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards.

- Provide a more detailed linking between Vermont Ethnic Studies Standards competencies and specific SBE-adopted content standard indicators.

- Connect with Act 1 Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group members to learn about the considerations that the Working Group has for implementation of these standards.

Additionally, the AOE is planning the rollout of the updated Educational Quality Standards (Rule Series 2000), with a focus on the new language specific to curriculum, content, and instructional strategies. (e.g., including intercultural competency as a transferable skill.) The Rule Series changes will impact the District Quality Review Process as outlined in Rule Series 100/District Quality Standards (DQS). The Vermont's IRIS Ethnic Studies Standards Framework will be an important consideration in establishing guidance and self-assessment tools/criteria for the Rule Series 2000 areas included in DQS 131.1.