

Public Comment for October 3, 2023:

Hi I'm Aaron Kindsvatter with the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR), a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties, and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding, and humanity. We have nearly 100 chapters and tens of thousands of members nationwide, including in Vermont.

Last year FAIR commented on the draft Education Quality Standards (EQS) during the Vermont State Board of Education's subcommittee meeting and in writing, sharing our concern that the EQS's term "critical" is ambiguous.

While the State Board subcommittee modified the standards by adding a definition of "critical thinking" -- which FAIR appreciates -- the subcommittee kept the word "critical" without the qualifier "thinking" in three spots so the ambiguity remains. Specifically, three draft EQS sections before you call for "critical examination." The word "critical" here could either (i) refer to conducting a thorough and scrutinizing examination, or (ii) be construed (or misconstrued) as requiring a critical race theory (CRT) informed analysis.

If the latter -- "critical race theory" -- the EQS will require every Vermont teacher to instruct their students to embrace CRT, which means look at ethnic groups through personal narratives rather than facts, focusing on race and "domination and oppression" rather than also as individuals and their contributions and successes. (See "Critical Theory," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

State Board Members Gleason, Kolbe, and Lovett were clear Summer 2022 that CRT is NOT what they desired.

But again if the EQS wording is left unchanged, CRT is how teachers will read the EQS because the rest of the standards say to "focus on [ethnic groups] systemic oppression" and use race as the "lens" -- mirroring the language of critical race theory.

This ambiguity has already opened the door for CRT. The EQS Working Group's recommended draft Ethnic Studies Frameworks, that cite the EQS's "critical examination" clause, are riddled with critical theory and CRT. For example, 15 of the Frameworks' recommended teacher resources are grounded in and promote critical theory and CRT such as "The Art of Critical Pedagogy," "Coloring in White Spaces," and two resources on the highly controversial liberation and critical theorist Paulo Freire's "critical," as in critical theory, consciousness.

To avoid this outcome -- and so have the EQS reflect the SBE subcommittee's intent -- FAIR encourages the Board simply to remove the term "critical" in the three places its appears in these two EQS sections (Sections 2110 and 2114).

Thank you.