

Public Comment:

I am writing as a resident of Washington County, parent of a future public-school student, and teacher employed in Chittenden County.

As an educator in Vermont, I have seen many “initiatives” come and go. Often, they are well intentioned, but fail to meet the very real needs of our most vulnerable students. I believe this failure is often rooted in the architecture, and architects, of change. Too often school-based changes are constructed by those who are, or have been, members of school administration and/or teaching staff who have gone on to fill positions at the Agency of Education or sat on committees run by the state. While it is true that those within the system are often well positioned to create change, it is also true that we can very easily overlook the changes most necessary to those experiencing the system first-hand. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, when change is created by those who are members of the educational workforce, we must examine the identities and positions from which decisions are made. Here in Vermont, that often means a very white, able-bodied, neurotypical perspective.

Much has been written about the incredible work led by the architects behind Vermont’s Act 1 working group. It is a dedicated body with incredible knowledge rooted in both study and lived experience. For the first time, to my knowledge, those most impacted by changes to educational policy were not only invited to the table, but were those constructing it. The working group was designed with inclusion in mind. It sought to elevate multiple perspectives in an effort to better serve all of Vermont’s students.

While I could speak to the risk of changing the language of the EQS at this late stage, I could speak to its intention and function, I’d like to instead point to a pattern repeating: those with the most institutional power are, once again, attempting to be the architects of change. When considering changes to the language of anti-discrimination, I believe it’s important that we look to see who is asking for what, and why.

When the community leaders behind Education Act 1 say that this language is needed, I believe them. I know that their perspective is rooted in experience and connection back to our most vulnerable students. Further, I know that what we have tried before simply has not worked and we must try something new. One need only look to the most recent YRBS data to see that our students are not having consistent experiences of school. I believe the State Board of Education should respect the expertise and time of the working group and understand that at this moment we can choose a new path forward: one that is far more inclusive and inviting, one that, hopefully, can positively impact the experiences of all our students.

Sincerely,
Christie Nold