

Please find attached a letter from a number of us who are Jewish Vermonters who support the definitions in the newly revised EQS Framework and Standards. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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Re: Final public comment on the Education Quality Standards (EQS) Framework and Standards
To: Chair Jenny Samuelson and the Vermont State Board of Education
From: Jewish Vermonters

Many of us have followed the passage of Act 1 by the Vermont legislature in 2019 and the subsequent hard work and diligence of the Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools on the EQS Framework and Standards, evolved by the working group. As Jewish Vermonters we are writing to make clear that we fully support the final definitions of Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Studies as written. We have also followed the engagement in this process of the Jewish Communities of Vermont, the views and tactics of which we find disappointing.

From the start, JCVT has played a negative, adversarial role in the work of the Coalition, often attempting to derail a transparent, democratic process and to put the experiences of Jews before those of all other marginalized groups. Early on the Coalition made a unanimous decision, accepted by the SBE, not to include a laundry list of all possible groups who could suffer discrimination in our schools, because it could never be inclusive enough - and to instead offer a definition of Ethnic Groups as including groups **"whose members identify with each other based on certain criteria, including a common history, ancestry or culture, religion, nationality, social or geographic origin, skin color, language, and experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, persecution or other inhuman treatment."**

That Jews and antisemitism are not explicitly named in this definition in no way excludes us, as it also does not exclude any other group which suffers bullying and discrimination in Vermont schools, e.g. Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Muslims, Asians, South Asians and many more. And yet during the final public commentary on Oct. 3, speaker after speaker said that Jews were being left out, singled, out as not worthy of mention, and emphasized the need to explicitly name Jews, and only Jews, because of our unique history.

We are also aware that many Jewish people benefit from white privilege. If the EQS were to specifically name and elevate anti-semitism that would represent for many of us a concrete example of using that privilege to separate our community from others who suffer from multiple intersecting forms of oppression. To create a more just and equitable Vermont for all of us, we need to take a strong stand together against all forms of discrimination, harassment and hate.

Furthermore, JCVT, in its public comments, has focused on the IHRA definition of antisemitism which purposely conflates antisemitism with anti-Zionism (opposition to a Jewish-only state), criticism of the State of Israel, and support for the legitimate rights of Palestinians <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/04/human-rights-and-other-civil-society-groups-urge-united-nations-respect-human>. In this they have worked openly with the Anti Defamation League, a regional and national organization with strong ties to the State of Israel.

JCVT has also attacked specific members of the Coalition, wrongfully accusing them of being anti-Israel because they are pro Palestinian, and therefore under this definition, antisemitic.

Antisemitism exists and is on the rise, as are all forms of racism today, and threatens all of us. But it is critical to understand that its proponents are right wing nationalists and white supremacists, *not* those who criticize Israel for its disregard of international law, or who support BDS as a non-violent strategy to bring Israel into compliance with international law. To ignore this fact allows real antisemitism to grow unchecked. Let us work together and build alliances to counter this more real threat to safety and equality for all Vermont students.

We thank the Coalition for its hard work, and thank you for for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion.

Sincerely,

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Jamie Spector, Plainfield
Elizabeth Blum, Norwich
Perry Bellow-Handelman, Middlesex
Brian Tokar, educator, East Montpelier
David Martin, Lyndonville
Jane Alper, Peacham
Joe Alper, Peacham
Tevye Kelman, teacher, Randolph
Sarah Lowry, Drama Therapist, Northfield
Debra Stoleroff, Plainfield
Andrew Simon, Burlington
Nelson Kasfir, Norwich
Josh Golin, Newfane
Alan Berolzheimer, Norwich

Alissa Mesibov, Brookfield
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