

Hi,

I wanted to comment on the proposed rule, and note and applaud the efforts of the Mount Mansfield School District as it comes to cultural inclusion and sensitivity.

The MMUSD elementary school system is currently graduating a class a year (soon to be two) of bi-lingual fluent spanish speakers as a part of their Spanish Immersion program. The students study almost exclusively in spanish until third grade when some english is begun to be included. (I have one child who has graduated from the program and three others currently enrolled.)

I feel very strongly that when it comes to cultural sensitivity, there is no match for speaking the language. A student who is able to fluently converse with another person will be more understanding and empathetic to them (almost by definition).

My concern is that in the proposed rule language learning is separated from "ethnic Studies" and (mostly) from "Culturally Responsive Teaching". I understand and applaud the effort to promote more culturally sensitivity and awareness, but I worry that it will manifest itself in a teacher telling students in English about Latin America, for example. The cultural sensitivity gained from learning another language cannot be compared to a survey of facts and figures about another culture - I applaud the MMUSD for their forward thinking recognition of this fact.

What if we set a statewide goal of having 80% of elementary school students in Vermont graduate with fluency in two languages in the next eight years? That is not only a reasonable thing to achieve ([92% of students in Europe learn a foreign language](#), for example), but it will promote a [radically more culturally sensitive student body](#) and give a tool for students to be able to use personally and professionally their entire lives.

A further benefit is that this is a measurable goal to achieve greater tolerance and inclusion, where a survey class in "cultural literacy" is, frankly, not going to achieve that goal. It will be difficult and require resources and effort, but will have a massive return on that investment. To paraphrase our president - "don't tell me how culturally sensitive you are, show me how well you can communicate with other cultures and I'll tell you how culturally sensitive you are."

Thank you for your thoughts on this challenging subject.

Roger

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