

TO: Vermont State Board of Education

FROM: Mark Tashjian, Head of School, Burr and Burton Academy

Sharon Howell, Head of School, St. Johnsbury Academy

Colin Igoe, Head of School, Long Trail School

Brian Bloomfield, Head of School, Lyndon Institute

RE: Connecting the Act 1 recommendations to Rules Series 2200

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Dear State Board Members,

Our schools strongly support integrating key recommendations from the Act 1 advisory group into the series 2200 rules, which govern the approval of independent schools in Vermont.

As you prepare a draft of the proposed rule changes, we understand that this rule will go through a robust public process, including review by the Intergovernmental Committee on Administrative Rules (ICAR) and the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR).

We are supportive of your efforts to synchronize the public comment periods for proposed changes to the 2200 Rule Series (independent school approval process) and the 2000 Rule Series (Education Quality Standards), so that there can be consistency on any final edits to changes that are specific to the principles of Act 1.

We look forward to participating in this public comment process, along with other interested parties and the general public, and trust that there will be ample opportunity for everyone to provide feedback to inform the final product.

To be very clear, we support the legislative intent of Act 1 of 2019, which recommends the following standards:

1. Increase cultural competency of students in prekindergarten through grade 12;
2. Increase attention to the history, contributions and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;
3. Promote critical thinking regarding the history, contributions and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;
4. Commit the school to eradicating any racial bias in its curriculum;
5. Provide, across its curriculum, content and methods that enable students to explore safely questions of identity, race equality and racism; and
6. Ensure that the basic curriculum and extracurricular programs are welcoming to all students and take into account parental concerns about religion or culture.

The assertion put forward by the Education Equity Alliance that our schools are exempt or would like to be exempt from Act 1 is simply not true. As you know, independent schools have a different governance structure and operating model. While our non-profit governance structure is incongruent with some of the specific governance requirements of EQS (e.g. rules governing authority of superintendents over school operations), we fully support a regulatory structure that applies the spirit and principles of Act 1 into our governance model. This is why we are supportive of incorporating the principles of Act 1 into the independent school approval process.

Our underlying goal is to provide the best possible education to every student in our various districts. Our schools are proud of the robust educational opportunities we provide students, including an unwavering commitment to delivering curricula that are equitable, inclusive, and just.

We feel compelled to put these positions on the record as we were very disappointed to see the Education Equity Alliance mischaracterize nuances between the series 2000 rules and the series 2200 rules as a “separate but equal” policy. This irresponsible mischaracterization is particularly troubling in the context of the important work outlined in Act 1.

Sincerely,

Mark Tashjian, Head of School, Burr and Burton Academy  
Sharon Howell, Head of School, St. Johnsbury Academy  
Colin Igoe, Head of School, Long Trail School  
Brian Bloomfield, Head of School, Lyndon Institute