

**State Board of Education
Education Quality Standards Rule Update Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Place: Virtual Teams Meeting/Video/Teleconference
Call in #: 1-802-828-7667, Conference ID: 199 203 20#**

Date: June 30, 2022

Present:

State Board Members (SBE): Kimberly Gleason (co-Chair), Tammy Kolbe (co-Chair), Tom Lovett, Patrick Brown (by phone; joined after vote to extend public comment)

Agency of Education (AOE): Maureen Gaidys, Suzanne Sprague

Introductions and roll call

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m.

Agenda modifications: Gleason asked the Committee for a motion to extend the time allotted for Public to be Heard. Lovett moved to extend the time allotted; Kolbe seconded. There was no discussion. Gleason called the vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Public to be heard (1st instance)

Kathy Shapiro (Community Member). Shapiro identified herself as someone who has observed the work by the Act 1 Working Group and also as a member of Vermont's Jewish community. She commented that she felt the revisions proposed by the Act 1 Working Group was logical and should work well in schools. She also acknowledged past objections by members of Vermont's Jewish community, which called for Anti-Semitism to be more clearly highlighted in the document. She commented that there are many groups affected by the language and that she viewed the language as broad and inclusive, and felt that highlighting any one group and Anti-Semitism specifically was objectionable.

Invited comments

Debra Stoleroff (Program Director, Twinfield Union School). Commented that she fully recommends the language proposed by the Act 1 Working Group. She noted that there are many teachers in the field who are already enacting the standards (as proposed), but that the revised standards will provide the encouragement and guidance needed for all teachers to do so. She commented that she felt the proposed recommendations were sufficient as written.

Perry Bellow-Handelman (Jewish community member and teacher of World History, Sociology and Ethnic Studies at Montpelier High School). She identified herself as someone who helped to write an ethnic studies curriculum for a large California school district. She supports a broad

definition of ethnic and social groups and expressed concerns about including a definition of Anti-Semitism in the EQS definitions.

Gleason asked Handelman about the need for balance between specificity and more general guidance for the purposes of effective practice in the classroom. Handelman indicated that more specificity would make it difficult for teachers to effectively implement the regulations in the classroom. The existing language is sufficiently specific.

Brown noted that in constructing definitions it will be important to be conscious of non-verbal communication in discrimination.

Yoram Samets (Jewish Communities of Vermont). He noted that the Jewish Communities of Vermont is an organization comprised of the organized Jewish communities in the state, including Rabbis and clergy. JCVT followed the work done by the Act 1 Working Group to ensure that the Jewish community was well-represented in the EQS standards. JCVT is not asking for a definition of Anti-Semitism in the EQS; however, he noted that JCVT is concerned that the proposed definitions for "Ethnic Group," "Ethnic Studies," and "Ethnicity" do not incorporate the same definitions/language as was included in Act 1. JCVT requests that the proposed definitions be revised to revert to the Act 1 definitions and language. Samets also commented that JCVT felt as if concerns the group voiced to the Act 1 Working Group were not addressed and that the group felt it had been excluded from the process.

Gleason clarified that Samets/JCVT was objecting to changes in definitions from the original language contained in Act 1 and what Samets meant by "exclusion" from the process. Samets notes that JCVT submitted written comments to the Act 1 Working Group, but felt that these comments were not addressed by the Group in its deliberations. JCVT participated in Public to be Heard testimony before the Act 1 Working Group.

Lovett noted that the suggested revisions proposed by JCVT reflected the challenge in finding balance between general and specific guidance and naming of specific groups.

Kolbe asked Samets if JCVT felt as if persecution and genocide, both terms included in the Act 1 language, were captured by the broader definition of oppression. Samets commented that they were not; persecution and genocide are different from oppression and are two words that are critical to recognizing the Jewish community in Vermont.

Gleason asked if what is being sought is inclusion of those two words in the definition. Samets agreed.

Leigh Ann O'Neill (Staff Attorney, Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism). O'Neill commented that her organization's interest was in making sure that revisions to the EQS did not restrict teachers' abilities to teach multiple points of view on selected topics. In particular, FAIR was concerned that the use of "critical" in the proposed definition of "Ethnic Studies" would be interpreted as a requirement for application of critical theory in teaching. O'Neill commented that FAIR would like to see the word "critical" removed from the definition.

Gleason commented that hearing there is a concern with the inclusion of the word "critical" without a definition, would it be appropriate for the EQS to include a definition of critical. O'Neill responded that incorporating a definition of "critical" in the EQS would be an improvement, as long as it was

carefully defined so that it does not limit what teachers teach so that students get broad understanding of social and ethnic studies.

Lovett noted that defining critical in the EQS would be helpful.

Kolbe noted that FAIR's written comments also suggested revising the proposed definition of "ethnic studies" to include "religion" and "religious groups" – even though the definition of "ethnicity" referenced in the definition of "ethnic studies" includes references to religion. Given this, she asked O'Neill why there is a need to explicitly include "religion" and "religious groups" in the definition of "ethnic studies." O'Neill agreed that this reference was sufficient.

Kathy Shapiro (Community Member). Shapiro noted that she took issue with the assertion by JCVT that it did not feel as if it was heard by the Act 1 Working Group in its deliberations. She noted that in her experience they were heard, although their proposed changes were not ultimately incorporated in the proposed revisions.

Gleason asked Shapiro if she was a member of the Act 1 Working Group. Shapiro noted that she was not. Member, but that she knows people on the committee and was involved in testimony.

Review and Approve minutes

Lovett moved to approve the minutes from the May 13, 2022 meeting of the EQS Committee. Kolbe seconded. There was no discussion. Gleason called the vote. The motion passed unanimously (Brown was absent for the vote).

Public to be Heard (2nd Instance)

Amanda Garces (Co-Chair Act 1 Working Group). Noted that she shared a letter with the SBE EQS Committee responding to concerns raised by JCVT.

Perry Bellow-Handelman (Jewish community member and teacher of World History, Sociology and Ethnic Studies at Montpelier High School). Noted that FAIR is a political action group from outside Vermont, with an explicit political agenda for lobbying against critical race theory in schools and promoting an anti-ethnic studies agenda.

Leigh Ann O'Neill (Staff Attorney, Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism). O'Neill disputed to Bellow-Handelman's remarks, stating that FAIR is a nonpartisan organization.

Planning for Next Meeting

The Committee discussed activities for its next meeting, including holding time for members from the Act 1 Working Group to respond to specific public comments.

Adjourn

Kolbe moved to adjourn the meeting. Lovett seconded. Gleason called a vote; it was unanimous (Brown was absent for vote). The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.