

October 9, 2020

To: Kim Gleason, Vermont State Board of Education  
From: Susan McCormack & Nadia Mitchell, Creative Discourse  
Re: Implicit bias training

We respectfully submit to you our interest in facilitating an introductory equity and implicit bias learning experience with the Vermont Board of Education.

## **Background**

A substantial portion of Vermont's population growth in the past two decades has come from the in-migration of BIPOC (Black, Indigeounous and People of Color) people. This in-migration has created an economic and social imperative to be more welcoming and inclusive in our schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Importantly, our education system works better when people feel heard and engaged, and when they are able to understand and access services and support available to them.

Complex challenges like building and sustaining economic growth or offering an equitable education to all Vermont children require community resiliency and systems that allow for reflection and self-correction. This means increasing participation and reducing marginalization for immigrants, BIPOC people, low-income families, members of the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, and anyone else experiencing disenfranchisement or isolation. In order to have a strong institution, we need to create a sense of belonging, and promote the values of diversity and inclusion to create welcoming spaces.

Addressing implicit bias and systemic racism is difficult for all involved, including white people. Whether it is a fear of saying the wrong thing or figuring out how to handle the realization that well-meaning people can still inflict harm, there are a host of questions, issues, and experiences that arise as one navigates the territory of self-reflection, exploration, and accountability that is inherent to understanding implicit bias. We believe that all people need a trusting environment in which to learn, assess, and understand systemic racism and its impact on individuals, communities, and institutions. Our work is about deepening understanding and encouraging courageous exploration through compassionate, honest, and action-oriented training.

We would like to stress that the process of understanding and mitigating implicit bias requires a long term commitment and cannot be addressed in a meaningful way through a single training. However, we celebrate the State Board of Education's determination to make a beginning and have confidence that we can offer an introductory experience that will position the board to make ongoing progress in creating equitable, inclusive policies and practices that make it possible for all board members to more fully reflect on the role of power, privilege, and bias in decisions.

## **Our Team**

[Susan McCormack](#) and [Nadia Mitchell](#) collectively have decades of experience working across difference to address social, economic, environmental, and educational injustice. We have experience working to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in school, municipal, and state settings. Our partnership is built on the philosophy that we need “different messengers” in the room who have a varied range of intersectional experiences, and specifically a multiracial team.

## **Proposed Workshop**

The process of understanding and mitigating implicit bias and racism requires a long-term commitment. While a single workshop can begin to raise awareness and create positive momentum, we want to acknowledge that meaningful change in improving the ability of board members to create equitable education policy will require a long-term process of self-reflection, learning, and adjustments to practices and policy setting.

As a starting point, we can work with your board to design and co-facilitate a three hour workshop that meets your specific needs. This interactive workshop would feature relevant content, group activities, and opportunities for small group dialogue. We would work with the board to prioritize a manageable set of goals for this initial workshop. Tentative workshop goals could include:

- Build self-awareness about participant’s own identities.
- Understand implicit bias (what it is, where it comes from, how it works). ●
- Build shared understanding about how bias contributes to structural inequities. ●
- Build shared understanding about the legacy of racism in the U.S. and Vermont ●
- Understand dominant culture
- Consider the impact of dominant culture on how the State Board of Education arrives at and implements policy and accountability decisions.
- Identify actions participants can take to reduce the impact of bias and inequities.