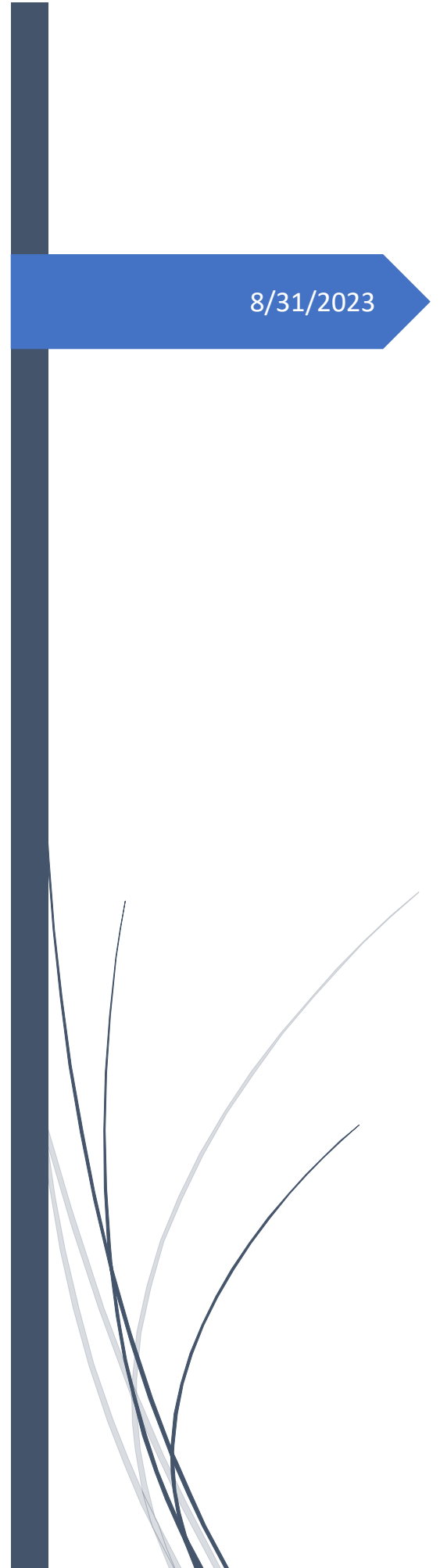




8/31/2023

Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group

*Final report of the Working Group to the Vermont
Legislature – August 31, 2023*



Introduction	1
Membership of the advisory Working Group as of August 30, 2023.....	1
Topics addressed in this report:	2
The EQS Manual.....	2
Future School Board Policies.....	3
Vermont’s I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Standards Framework	5
Act 1 Technical Advisory Group.....	7
Conclusion.....	8

Introduction

This is the final report to the Vermont Legislature from the Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group (hereafter, “Working Group”). Our mandate to conduct business was authorized by [Act 1 \(2019\)](#) and ends on August 31 this year. This report is being submitted just three months shy of the fourth-year anniversary of the Working Group’s first meeting in November 2019, in Montpelier High School, where it was convened under the direction of Secretary of Education Dan French. At that inaugural meeting, the Working Group elected Amanda Garcés as chairperson and Mark Hage as vice-chairperson. It has been an honor and privilege to serve in these capacities.

Membership of the advisory Working Group as of August 30, 2023

The Working Group at this time comprises the following individuals appointed by the Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group and Vermont educational organizations:

Addie Lentzner	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Amanda Garcés (Chair)	Vermont Human Rights Commission designee
Amanda Rohdenburg	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Barbra Marden	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Celilo Bauman-Swain	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Chelsea Myers	Vermont Superintendents Association designee
Cynthia Reyes	Vermont-based, college-level faculty
Diego Soria	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Heather Bouchey	The Secretary of Education designee
Heather Lynn	Vermont School Boards Association designee
Yvonna Stewart	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Mill Moore	Vermont Independent Schools Association
Joyce Lee	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Lynn Murphy	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Mark Hage (co-chair)	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Mikaela Simms	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)

Nicholas Lalanne	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Miakoda Schultz	Education Justice Coalition (DBA, VCESES)
Michael Martin	Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association designee
Mike McGraith	Vermont Principals Association designee
Natasha Eckart Banning	Vermont- National Education Association, designee
Vera Sheehan	Abenaki Representative
Xusana Davis	Executive Director of Racial Equity

Topics addressed in this report:

1. Proposed revisions to the Educational Quality Standards (EQS) Manual (Rule Series 2000).
2. Approved recommendations in progress on school board policies deemed essential to implementing the changes in the revised EQS Manual.
3. A submission to the State Board of Education of a document titled “Vermont’s I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Standards Framework.”
4. The future duties of the Act 1 Technical Advisory Group, established by Act 66/H.461 in 2023.

The EQS Manual

In April 2022, the Working Group submitted [a comprehensive set of revisions](#) to the EQS Manual to the State Board of Education. Over the course of the next twelve months, the Working Group collaborated with an appointed EQS Committee of the State Board. Our duties here included explicating for the committee the Working Group’s research, writing, public engagement, and deliberative processes, providing requested supplemental information and reports, and answering general and specific questions about the genesis, rationale, and content of the group’s EQS submission. This was a challenging and time-consuming endeavor for both parties, and, ultimately, a successful one.¹ The State Board, after soliciting testimony and written commentary on the revised manual from us and other sources, including the Agency of Education, approved a revised draft of the [EQS Manual](#) on May 23 of this year.

The Interagency Committee on Administrative Rules (ICAR) has since completed its review and evaluation of the draft manual. The [filing](#) submitted to ICAR is now in the hands of the Secretary of State. Further, [three virtual public hearings](#) are scheduled for September and October:

- September 13, 6:30 p.m.
- September 28, 11:30 a.m.
- October 3, 6:30 p.m.²

¹ On a personal note, we would like to express our gratitude to Tammy Kolbe and Kim Gleason for their leadership of the EQS Committee of the State Board of Education.

² The public can submit written comments through [the seventh day](#) following the last public hearing (October 10).

When public comment comes to an end, the EQS Committee will reflect on and assess the testimony and written feedback and, if it warrants, recommend to the State Board further modifications to the manual. The committee will also give its rationale for why it did not incorporate public comments into the proposed manual and share this, too, with the State Board.

The EQS Committee of the State Board hopes to complete its work by mid-November this year, before resubmitting the manual to the full board in December. If approved then (or later if matters dictate), with or without new modifications, the manual will make its way to the **Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules** (LCAR).

Future School Board Policies

In its statutory mandate, the Working Group is authorized to present commentary or recommend changes to school district or supervisory union policies that:

“...[I]t has identified as needing review or amendment in order to:

(A) promote an overarching focus on preparing all students to participate effectively in an increasingly racially, culturally, and socially diverse Vermont and in global communities;

(B) ensure every student is in a safe, secure, and welcoming learning and social environment in which bias, whether implicit or explicit, toward others based on their membership in ethnic or social groups is acknowledged and addressed appropriately;

(C) challenge racist, sexist, or ableist bias, or bias based on gender or socioeconomic status, using principles aligned with restorative practice;

(D) specify prohibited conduct as it relates to racism, sexism, ableism, and other ethnic and social biases and refers to the process through which alleged misconduct will be addressed, including disciplinary action as appropriate;

(E) establish disciplinary responses to racial or ethnic and social group incidents that include the utilization of restorative practices where appropriate; and

(F) ensure that the school diversifies its workforce and provides its personnel training in how best to address bias incidents.

On August 31, 2023, a motion on the adoption of targeted school board policies to achieve these objectives was approved by the Working Group. The recommendations were first debated and drafted by a Policy Sub-committee of the full group. Members of the policy sub-committee included:

Addie Lentzner, Executive Director for the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network

Amanda Garces, Director of Policy Education and Outreach for the Vermont Human Rights Commission

Chelsea Myers, Associate Executive Director for the Vermont Superintendents Association

Heather Lynn, Managing Partner at Lynn, Lynn, Blackman and Manitsky

Lynn Murphy, Science teacher

Mia Schultz, President of the Rutland Area NAACP

Mike McRaith, Associate Executive Director for the Vermont Principals' Association

Nicholas Lalanne, Senior Lecturer of American Sign Language

Vera Sheehan, Vermont Abenaki Artists Association

Sue Ceglowski, Executive Director of the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), also played a critical advisory role in the development of **these recommendations**:

1) **Legislation on Training**: Require (by amending 16 V.S.A. 561) all school board chairs and superintendents be trained in the meaning, importance, and implementation of educational equity for all students;

2) **Legislation on Policy**: Statutorily require school boards to adopt the following policies that shall be at least as comprehensive as the VSBA model policies to advance the goals of the revised EQS Manual:

- a. "Access to Instructional Materials" (VSBA's Library Policy) to effectuate the provisions of Section 2122.2 of the EQS Manual. Libraries should offer access to age- and grade-appropriate books and other materials that adequately and fairly reflect the historical and contemporary experiences of our country's ethnic, cultural, and social groups. Librarians also need to be actively supported and protected from ungrounded criticism or personal attacks in the pursuit of this obligation.
- b. "District Equity Policy" to effectuate the pertinent provisions in the revised EQS Manual that speak to equity in a classroom or educational setting.
- c. "Community Engagement and Vision" to effectuate the community engagement provisions of Section 2121.1 of the EQS Manual and to bring into school-decision making and governance the voices, contributions, and experiences of students, parents, caregivers, and others who traditionally have not been a party to this work or have lacked welcoming access to it.

Please note: These policies are found in VSBA's Model Policy Manual. While certain school districts have voluntarily approved one or more of these policies, Vermont school boards in are not required by law to adopt them.

3) **Legislation on Data Collection and Reporting**: Require the Agency of Education to gather and publish data from Vermont K-12 schools aimed at tracking the progress and impact of changes in the revised EQS Manual to inform future steps with respect to equity and inclusion in Vermont schools. Data to be gathered and published may include (this is not an exhaustive list): a. participation in advanced and/or specialized content classes; b. graduation rates; c. discipline rates (by types and duration); etc.

4) **Legislation on State Board Membership:** Impose requirements with respect to the appointment of members of the State Board of Education so that its composition is reflective of the diversity of Vermont’s publicly-funded student body.

5) **Proposed Amendment to State Board of Education Rule 4500:** Specifically, amend Rule 4504.a. to require schools to report the ethnicity, national origin, or race, and/or disability of the student who experienced restraint and/or seclusion.

Additionally, the Working Group proposes that the Agency of Education be mandated to maintain updated guidance and updates on best practices regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students and [such that guidance to be updated, at minimum, every three years.](#)

We also strongly encourage the legislature to collaborate with Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services to gain a deep understanding of the unique needs of our Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Deafblind students. Furthermore, we recommend the establishment of a statutory policy aimed at providing comprehensive support to this particular demographic.

Vermont’s I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Standards Framework

The “[Vermont State Ethnic Studies Standards Framework](#)” (hereafter, “Standards Framework”) was unanimously endorsed by the Working Group on Thursday, June 15, 2023.

This submission, like the previous one, is in the statutory purview of the Working Group. Act 1 (2019) authorized us to: *review and recommend updates and additional standards to the State Board of Education, ensuring the recognition of the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups.* The Standards Framework was strongly influenced by proposed revisions to the EQS Manual.

[Act 66](#), passed in 2021, allocated funding to the Agency of Education to engage a contractor with expertise to assist the Working Group in developing the Standards Framework. In January 2023, the Working Group entered into a service agreement with **Community Responsive Education (CRE)** to provide substantial assistance in the conceptualization and drafting of the framework. CRE was selected for its nationally recognized expertise and experience in supporting school districts and educators in the field of Ethnic Studies.

The CRE team is based in California and consists of Professor Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and public-school educators Samia Shoman and Aimee Riechel. The contract with CRE spanned six months (January - June) and involved regular consultations with a Writing Team of four individuals who have served the Working Group since its inception:

- **Cynthia Reyes**, a professor of Education and Associate Dean at the University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services.
- **Michael Martin**, Executive Director of the Rowland Foundation, former Vermont Curriculum Director, and the representative to the Working Group of the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association.
- **Mark Hage**, vice-chairperson of the Working Group and facilitator of its EQS Manual Committee.
- **Amanda Garcés**, chairperson of the Working Group and Director of Policy, Education and Outreach for the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

The contract outlined these objectives for CRE:

- *Review and Analyze ways to embed an ethnic studies framework and criteria in the Educational Content Standards, PreK through Grade 12, with a focus on increasing cultural competency among students.*
- *Increase attention to and promote critical thinking regarding the history, contribution, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups;*
- *Commit schools to eradicating any racial bias in their curriculum, and to provide, across school curriculum, content and methods that enable students to explore safely questions of identity, race equality, and racism; and*
- *Ensure that the basic curriculum and extracurricular programs are welcoming to all students and take into account parental concerns about religion or culture.*

The deliverables of the Contractor were:

- 1) *A complete review of Vermont’s Educational Standards through the lens of Act 1 (2019);*
- 2) *A proposal outlining ways that Vermont can embed an ethnic studies framework and criteria in the Educational Content Standards, PreK through Grade 12.*

Moreover, CRE was tasked with advising *the Act 1 Working Group’s School Board Policies Subcommittee in its process of developing recommendations to enhance existing local board policies or propose new ones that impact standards for student performance and curriculum in alignment with the Ethnic Studies Framework, PreK through Grade 12.”*

There were multiple iterations of the Standards Framework; each was shared with the Working Group at publicly warned meetings. This intense drafting and engagement process, both by the Writing Team and the Working Group, entailed robust discussions, questions, and public comment, which in turn enabled the sharing and integration of diverse perspectives. The Writing Team also sought feedback from trusted educators and advisors outside the Working Group who are strong supporters of our mission. Their contributions were instrumental.

Most of the substantive commentary on the Standards Framework, however, came from representatives appointed to the Working Group under Act 1 (2019). Once more, we are appreciative of the insightful perspectives and hard work of the Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont Principals’ Association, the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, the Vermont-National Education Association, the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, and the Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools.

The Standards Framework, as mentioned above, received unanimous approval on June 15 in a motion that also endorsed sharing with the State Board of Education feedback received from [public sources](#) outside the Working Group. As the Standards Framework progresses towards formal consideration (and approval, we hope), the Working Group welcomes a spirited and rich public dialogue on the document, believing this foundational to the success and welfare of Vermont schools, students, and communities in the realm of Ethnic Studies.

The Standards Framework comprises eight sections:

1. Acknowledgements

2. Introduction: Background and Content
3. Vermont State I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Standards Framework: Student Standards
4. Pedagogical Commitments
5. Crosswalk with Other State Standards
6. Assessments & Potential Summative Experiences
7. Guidelines for Ethnic Studies Implementation
 - Teacher Preparation & Support
 - District/School Readiness & Sustainability
8. Resources and Suggested Materials

The Standards Framework is anchored in the principles and practice of “**transformative solidarity**.” Transformative Solidarity, for our purposes, is defined as the conceptual and ethical foundation of an educational system that celebrates the history and cultures of students, school staff, families, and local communities. It emphasizes sharing and generating knowledge, particularly of groups that have been historically and contemporarily persecuted, marginalized, or silenced. It also recognizes the interconnectedness of people, communities, and movements toward knowledge and freedom and requires relationships based on mutual respect, healing, and a collective effort to identify and overcome racist, discriminatory and oppressive systems.

The Standards Framework also calls for local schools and communities to commit to rigorously studying the histories and contributions of **Ethnic Studies Groups**, to collectively build a just, inclusive, anti-racist, and democratic Vermont. Building on the definition of “Ethnic Studies” in the revised EQS Manual, “Ethnic Studies Groups” refers specifically to: *“Black, Indigenous (with a special focus on the Indigenous People of Vermont, the Abenaki, Mahican, Pennacook, Pocomtuc, and others), Asian Americans, Latinas/os/xs/e, and additional People of Color.”*

The components of the Standards Framework are structured in accordance with the “**I.R.I.S. Ethnic Studies Domains**,” which encompass **Identity Development**, **Resisting Racism**, **Interconnectedness**, and **Social Responsibility**. Each domain specifies academic competencies, followed by explanations of their relevance to pedagogy, Ethnic Studies’ curricular content, and student assessments (formative and summative). The examples provided in the Standards Framework are not exhaustive or prescriptive, highlighting the critical importance of local initiative, collaboration, and leadership in the design and implementation of Ethnic Studies tailored to the curricular requirements and aspirations of each school district and community.

The concluding section of the Framework emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation and support, as well as school district readiness and sustainability. It accents the vital role of educational leadership in implementing and sustaining Ethnic Studies, the importance of safe, inclusive environments for students, and the necessity of well-resourced programs, high expectations in teacher preparation, and quality curriculum.

[Act 1 Technical Advisory Group](#)

In June, the Legislature passed [Act 66 \(H.461\)](#) and established the Act 1 Technical Advisory Group (TAG). It will have twelve active members, designated or appointed by the following organizations: (1) the Chairperson of the Working Group, the designee of the Vermont Human Rights Commission; (2) the Vice Chairperson of the Working Group, the designee of the Vermont-National Education Association; (3) the designee of the Vermont School Boards Association; (4) the designee of the Vermont Superintendents

Association; (5) the designee of the Vermont Principals' Association with expertise in the development of school curriculum; (6) the designee of the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association; (7) the Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools appointee member from Outright Vermont; (8) the Vermont-based, college-level faculty expert in Ethnic Studies; (9) the designee of the Vermont Office of Racial Equity; (10) the student appointee from Montpelier High School; (11) the designee of the Vermont Independent Schools Association; and (12) the designee of the Agency of Education.

TAG's duties will commence after the Working Group disbands, providing counsel and assistance to the Legislature, the Agency of Education, and the State Board of Education on recommendations made by the Working Group in the following areas:

- (1) proposed revisions and comments to Agency of Education on the EQS Manual;
- (2) updates and additional standards for student performance proposed to the State Board of Education pursuant to Act 1 (2019);
- (3) policy recommendations submitted to the Legislature; and
- (4) any other recommendations submitted to the Legislature or State Board of Education.

Unless extended, the mandate of TAG is slated to end January 31, 2024.

Conclusion

No less than four years of rigorous, exciting, demanding, and intensely collaborative work will have transpired when the Technical Advisory Group completes the last stage of the Working Group's mission this January. It is usually the case with projects of this nature, the *real work* will begin after the revised EQS Manual and the I.R.I.S. Framework are approved in toto and disseminated widely for local assessment, refinement, and implementation, with the backing of new and revised school board policies as previously discussed.

To succeed in the establishment of age- and grade-appropriate Ethnic and Social Equity Studies, pre-K through Grade 12, the State of Vermont and local school districts must provide their staffs – administrators, educators, and support personnel – with ample time, material resources, professional guidance, and funding, and to facilitate the requisite working and social conditions for them to collaborate respectfully and productively with students, families, community members, each other, and outside experts.

To this last point, in line with the Vermont Leadership Standards, the proposed I.R.I.S. Standards Framework calls on school districts with support from the state to:

- Provide the capacity for resourcing and sustaining Ethnic Studies through intentional recruitment and retention of a trained professional to coordinate Ethnic Studies initiatives in school districts.
- Partner with other educational research entities also involved in Ethnic Studies work (e.g., Agency of Education, universities, colleges) for intentional mentoring and renewal work.
- Promote renewal and accountability among teachers with professional development initiatives that foster critical examination of potential barriers to student's academic, social, and cultural growth.
- Support and promote teacher professional growth in self-learning and reflection.

These bullet points interestingly are very consistent with preliminary thinking of the Working Group in the late fall of 2020. We were looking ahead then to the creation of curricular and pedagogical systems to implement the fruits of our labors and to realize the vision of Act 1 (2019). In other words, we grappled with how the State of Vermont, local schools and their communities could achieve the objectives that would ultimately find expression in the revised EQS Manual and the I.R.I.S. Framework? This would require, we concluded, *“substantial and sustained support to educators, support personnel, administrators, school boards, parents/caregivers, students, and local activists committed to transforming their curricula, pedagogy, professional development practices, and public-school cultures in ways that center ethnic studies and social equity programs in the academic and social lives of Vermont’s children, Pre-K through Grade 12.”*

More specifically, we believed long-term partnerships between school districts, the Agency of Education, and entities like Community Responsive Education with successful experience in curricular design and professional development in Ethnic and Social Equity Studies would be essential and pathbreaking. With expert guidance, planning, and encouragement at the local, state, and regional level, in combination with the cross-fertilizing impact of cutting-edge ideas and programs shared and practiced statewide, Vermont schools could dedicate themselves to:

- 1) Designing evaluative tools and metrics that school boards, school staff, parents/caregivers, and local activists can deploy to assess school policies, curricula, alternative learning models, student disciplinary systems, and pedagogical practices in relation to Ethnic and Social Equity Studies.
- 2) Forming and supporting local curriculum committees with staff and community involvement to align curricula with the goals of Act 1 (2019) and, in time, with revised educational standards and State Board of Education rules.
- 3) Building professional development collaboratives that recruit Vermont educators to undertake post-graduate course work in ethnic/social equity studies and facilitating networks of educators who want to be part of a pedagogical support community and to serve as change agents.
- 4) Exploring the feasibility of offering virtual academic courses in Ethnic and Social Equity Studies to students, educators, and school staff and, potentially, to parents/caregivers and community members.

Today, in concert with these early recommendations and those that emerged much later in consultation with CRE and community supporters, the Working Group urges the Legislature to create a full-time position at the Agency of Education dedicated to the implementation of Ethnic and Social Equity Studies statewide and to supporting school boards and school personnel in this complex endeavor. We further recommend that this expert be selected from a pool of highly qualified and experienced applicants after a national search process, with individuals being vetted and interviewed by a hiring task force composed of community representatives appointed by the Education Justice Coalition and the Educators of Color Association, the Office of Racial Equity, and Vermont’s educational organizations (VPA, VSA, VSBA, VCLA, VT-NEA and VISA). Finally, the ongoing, multi-year work of this individual at the AOE should be informed, advanced, and evaluated in regular consultation with a special advisory group of representatives selected by the institutional entities above.

Our previous reports can be accessed on the Agency of Education website under [the 'Ethnic and Social Equity Advisory Working Group' section](#).

If you have questions for us or need further clarification or documentation please contact Amanda Garces, Director of Policy, Education and Outreach for the Vermont Human Rights Commission.
Amanda.garces@vermont.gov

Thank you for your support and trust.