

## 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: 977 147 434#**

**Date: July 28, 2022**

**Present:**

**State Board of Education (SBE) Subcommittee Members:** Kimberly Gleason (co-Chair), Tammy Kolbe (co-Chair), Tom Lovett, Patrick Brown (joining at 10:45 a.m.)

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Suzanne Sprague

**Others:** Cynthia Reyes, Yoram Samets, Alyssa Chan, Matt Vogel, Josh Daniels

**Call to Order, Roll Call**

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

**Public to be Heard**

*Cynthia Reyes (Associate Professor, University of Vermont; Member Act 1 Working Group).*

Dr. Reyes shared her insights into the Act 1 Working Group's use of the term "critical" in the proposed definition for "Ethnic Studies." She noted that the Act 1 Working Group discussed the use of this term in their deliberations and acknowledged the sensitivity with incorporating this language in the proposed revisions to the rules. Dr. Reyes clarified that the Group's intent in including the word "critical" in the "Ethnic Studies" definition was to indicate the importance of "critical skills" when students read for deeper meaning. It was not intended to explicitly or implicitly reference or call upon critical race theory as an ethnic studies framework. Rather, the word "critical" was intended to prompt educators to incorporate a critical pedagogy, focused on fostering students' capacity to critically evaluate information.

Lovett asked Dr. Reyes if the Working Group considered other possible synonyms for "critical" in their deliberations, recognizing the potential sensitivity of incorporating this term in the definition. Dr. Reyes responded that the group had in depth discussions of disparity and equity, and that the group felt there was the need to incorporate the term "critical" in the definition to underscore the need for pedagogy that prompted examination of issues from different perspectives. Dr. Reyes also noted that the Working

Group intended the proposed language to serve as a guide and resource to educators, but also recognized that each district would need to develop its own shared understanding of what the term critical means for their context.

*Yoram Samets (Jewish Communities of Vermont)*. He noted that the Jewish Communities of Vermont were supportive, conceptually, of the work being done to incorporate the Act 1 Working Group's proposed revisions to the EQS. He noted their interest in seeing the specific language included in Act 1, which defined ethnic groups to include those groups that were historically subject to persecution and genocide. There also was an interest in revising the proposed definition to limit Ethnic Studies to only groups in the United States. He reminded the EQS Subcommittee that the Jewish Communities of Vermont were involved in crafting the language included in Act 1. He also shared with the Subcommittee concerns about the rise in Antisemitism in Vermont.

*Alyssa Chan (Coordinator of Education Justice Coalition of Vermont)*. Ms. Chan spoke to affirm the that she felt the definition of ethnic groups proposed by the Act 1 Working Group is aligned with contemporary social constructions for ethnic and social groupings.

*Matt Vogel (Citizen, Ferrisburgh, Vermont)*. Mr. Vogel noted that he was supportive of the efforts to make sure that public education is as inclusive and equitable as possible. But also noted the rise in Antisemitism in Vermont and called upon the EQS Subcommittee to incorporate language included in Act 1 that explicitly referenced "persecution" and "genocide" in the definition of "Ethnic Studies."

### **Approve June 30, 2022 Minutes**

Lovett moved to approve the minutes from the June 30, 2022, meeting of the EQS Committee. Kolbe seconded. There was no discussion. Gleason called the vote. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Committee consideration of feedback received regarding definitions discussed at the June 30, 2022 meeting**

The committee discussed whether to revise the definition of Ethnic Studies that was proposed by the Act 1 Working Group.

Lovett offered several observations. First, that there has been quite a bit of interest in the definition of "Ethnic Studies" from various stakeholder groups, and he noted that the supplemental memo from Amanda Garces and Mark Hage, along with Dr. Reyes comments, provided more context for what was recommended. Lovett noted that proposed definitions for #17 and #18 are more specific with respect to ethnic groups (e.g., identifies specific Indigenous groups and tribes), and this suggests some rationale for making the definition of "ethnic Group" more general (i.e., there are references to specific groups elsewhere in the definitions). That said, he also noted that the legislation was very specific about groups, so there will be a need to balance the "general" with the "specific" in this definition. Second, he noted that the supporting information provided by the Act 1 Working Group did not offer a clear rationale for

why the specific language contained in Act 1 that references “genocide” in the definition of Ethnic Group was not included. He would like to learn more about the rationale not to include the specific Act 1 language.

Gleason shared similar observations, noting that the definition of Ethnic Group is broad, with good intentions to avoid “making a list” that would introduce the risk of excluding a group. She also noted that she was also trying to understand why the definition of Ethnic Group did not include language that more closely aligns with the part (b) of the definition included in Act 1. She felt reasonably comfortable that the overall definition of Ethnic Group is sufficiently inclusive and would like to focus the language included in definitions #17 and #18.

Lovett noted that in #17 the language “may involve critical” may also apply to sexual identification, disability, and class, since those terms were also included in the definition of “Social Group.” He was curious about whether including the term “critical” has more power if it is included in Ethnic Studies and wondered about how the definitions needed to be revised to clarify social groupings in the standards.

Gleason and Lovett discussed whether including the terms “persecution” and “genocide” in definition #17, which included other action verbs, would be an appropriate place to include the language referenced in Act 1. Lovett noted that in #17, as proposed, there are a list of actions in the middle of that definition, and that these additional actions could be added there.

Brown noted that we needed to consider in any revision the fact that terms included in the EQS are fluid and evolving.

Gleason noted that she did not support including a definition of religion in the EQS, given that this would be difficult to define since religion can mean very different things to different people and would worry that defining religion would be limited to only recognized religions and religious activities. Lovett noted that the Act 1 Working Group changed the term from creed to religion to be more inclusive. He also noted that it was important to keep in mind how teachers would operationalize guidance and terms in their work.

Kolbe noted that “religion” is included in the definition of “Ethnic Group” and that by extension, religious groups would be included in teaching standards under the definition of “Ethnic Studies.” She did not feel additional clarification was necessary.

Lovett concurred that he did not think that the EQS should define religion as a term. “Religious” is included in the definition of culture, and if religion is incorporated in that definition, then under “Ethnicity” the reference to culture will be inclusive of religion. There is no need to explicitly call out in #17 or #18 since it is embedded in other definitions (as a group, but not an individual).

## **Next Steps/Future Agenda Items**

The committee agreed to the following next steps and agenda items:

- a. Considering potential language change for #17 (Ethnic Studies) so that this definition parallels what is included in the Act 1 statute, with specific reference to “genocide”
- b. A discussion of whether to incorporate a definition of “critical” in the EQS
- c. Solicit input from stakeholders on any other proposed definitions

## **Public to be Heard**

No individuals presented themselves for comment.

## **Adjourn**

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

Minutes prepared by Tammy Kolbe.