



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: Vermont Board of Education
RE: Comments on Vermont's Education Quality Standards
FROM: Susan Aranoff, J.D., Senior Planner and Policy Analyst
DATE: November 30, 2022

Thank you for holding this evening's public listening session concerning Vermont's Education Quality Standards. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Vermont's Education Quality Standards. I am commenting on behalf of the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council.

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (hereafter "VTDDC") is a statewide board created by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights (hereafter "the DD Act"), first adopted by Congress in 1970. An estimated 86,000 Vermonters experience a developmental disability as defined by the DD Act.

VTDDC is charged under federal law with engaging at the state level in "advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities that... contribute to the coordinated, consumer- and-family-centered, consumer-and-family directed, comprehensive system that includes needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families."

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council considers the Education Quality Standards from the viewpoint of Vermonters who have an important stake in the availability of a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, our nation's special education law, provides that each eligible child with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education or FAPE. Every student with a disability has the right to a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the child's unique needs. Every student with a disability has the right to a FAPE that prepares the child for further education, employment, and independent living.

The VTDDC is compelled to comment on the proposed changes to Vermont's Education Quality Standards (EQS) because the Council has concluded that the EQS changes will make Vermont's schools better for students with disabilities.

Specifically, the proposed changes will provide strong support to learners who use educational and assistive technology. Similarly, the proposed changes support providing learning experiences designed for neurodiversity that include multiple ways for students to access learning.

In addition, the proposed changes promote learning opportunities that recognize the lived experience of students who are neurodiverse and/or have disabilities.

Finally, the proposed changes support the provision of accessible print, multimedia, alternate format instructional materials (e.g., high-quality MP3 audio files, electronic braille, and other forms of E- texts).

In addition to supporting the changes to the EQS because they will improve access to a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities, the Council also supports the proposed changes because they will improve access to basic educational services for Vermont students who are BIPOC, LGBTQIA, low income, and/or multilingual.

Below are some of the proposed EQS changes the Council strongly supports:

- Provide all students with an anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, and equitable education.
- Prepare students to work, train, and learn in socially and culturally inclusive spaces.
- Create learning spaces that improve student wellbeing, including opportunities for movement in the classroom.
- Create classroom cultures based on restorative justice.
- Provide students with high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction in the early grades.
- Have administrators take part in professional development that will help further equity in the supervisory union/school district.
- Offer counseling services that are respectful of students' identities and support students who experience or witness racism, ablism, or other forms of discrimination.

- Teach about ways different social, cultural, racial, linguistic, ethnic and Indigenous groups have throughout history and currently contributed to building and strengthening democracy in the US and globally.
- Promote research, coordination, and professional learning that leads to developing Ethnic Studies programming and resources integrated into across the curriculum.
- Recognize and reduce any financial barriers to accessing flexible pathways such as out-of-school learning opportunities Further economic justice by asking schools to teach about and help students understand why everyone should have economic opportunities.
- Collect data to see if there is disproportional representation in school programs such as suspension and detentions, special education, or advanced placement courses.
- Make sure multilingual students have access to all instruction and school-based programs by providing interpretation, technology, and other services.

In conclusion, the Council wishes to recognize the hard work and tremendous accomplishments of the task force that has put forth the recommended changes to the Education Quality Standards. Likewise, the Council extends its appreciation to the members of the State Board of Education. We thank you for your service and for your consideration of the proposed changes to Vermont's Education Quality Standards.

