

TO: Members of the House and Senate Education Committees  
CC: Sponsors of H.794 and Agency of Education  
FROM: Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools  
SUBJECT: In reference to H.794  
DATE: April 3, 2018

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The Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools would like to take the time to respond to the H.794 amendments put forward by the Agency of Education on March 30, 2018.

The amended bill changes significantly the spirit of the bill and we would like to provide testimony regarding our position in the hopes that a resolution can be made.

In 1999 the Vermont Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights published report a called [\*Racial Harassment in Vermont Public Schools\*](#) and described the state of racism in public schools. The committee held various hearings and received reports from stakeholders and concluded that “racial harassment” appeared “pervasive in and around the state’s public schools,” and observed that “the elimination of this harassment” was “not a priority among school administrators, school boards, elected officials, and state agencies charged with civil rights enforcement.”

[In 2003 the commission released a follow-up report](#) concluding that although some positive efforts had been made since the original report was published, the problem persisted. One of the many problems highlighted was the “curriculum issues in the State's Public schools. In some instances, teachers employ curriculum materials and lesson plans that promote racial stereotypes.” One of the conclusions was that there was a need for a bias-free curriculum.

On December 2017, [The Act 54 report on Racial Disparities in State Systems, issued by the Attorney General and Human Rights Commission Task Force was released](#). According to the report, education is one of the five state systems in which racial disparities persist and need to be addressed. The AGO and HRC held three stakeholder meetings and found “a surprising amount of coalescence around the most important issues” and “the primary overarching theme was that we will be able to reduce racial disparities by changing the underlying culture of our state with regard to race.” One of the main suggestions for accomplishing this was to “**teach children from an integrated curriculum that fairly represents both the contributions of People of Color (as well as indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, etc.), while fairly and accurately representing our history of oppression of these groups.**” The other suggestions were to 2) educate state employees about implicit bias, White Privilege, White Fragility and White Supremacy; and 3) increase the representation of People of Color in the state and school labor forces by focusing on recruitment, hiring and retention, as well as promotion of People of Color into positions of authority and responsibility on boards and commissions.

The harassment of LGBTQIA communities, other students of color, students with disabilities, and the lack of understanding of people in power about the magnitude of the systemic impacts of harassment and bias damages the whole community.

H.794 as proposed is about addressing the pervasive systemic racism that exists within our schools by tackling the issue at its root and by also ending the systemic marginalization of other groups including communities with disabilities, LGBTQIA communities, and women.

One of the characteristics of systemic racism is that the systems and structures (i.e. the education system) in place work to marginalize non-dominant groups, *even if the individuals running the system do not have deliberate discriminatory intent*. The purpose of H.794 is to undo this systemic racism in the Vermont Education system.

A quality education is the foundation that every person needs in order to live well in a complex modern society like the U.S. in the twenty-first century. The intent of this bill is to establish new standards for pre-K through 12th grade Vermont students that will provide a quality education that will prepare them to live in a more diverse Vermont and a more diverse country, and to have a more accurate representation of history and the world. Ethnic and social equity standards are a necessary and desired precondition for addressing the systemic inequalities and disparities in the Vermont educational system.

All students (including students who have enjoyed the privileges of a system which has set them up for success) will benefit from this bill. The language we used in crafting the bill is strategic and intentional, with an aim to counter structural racism and other forms of oppression. We encourage you to revisit our suggestions and language. The Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools is comprised of members who have rich experience doing work that counters systemic racism and other forms of discrimination. We look forward to working with you to make this bill as strong and effective as it can be, and welcome any opportunities for collaboration.

Signed,

Amanda Garces, Coordinator of the Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools  
Carlen Finn, Senior Policy Associate, Voices for Vermont's Children  
Jabari Jones, Black Lives Matter of Greater Burlington  
Katrina Battle, Milton Inclusion and Diversity Initiative  
Mara Iverson, Education Director, Outright Vermont  
Marita Canedo, Migrant Justice  
Melissa Battah, Community member  
Sarika Tandon, Equity Consultant, Race Equity and Environment  
Wafic Faour, Vermonters for Justice in Palestine