

VERMONT COALITION FOR ETHNIC AND SOCIAL EQUITY IN SCHOOLS



CAMPAIGN CONVENER

Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools (VCESES)

The VCESES is a statewide coalition led by a multicultural and multigenerational group including: people of color from various racial and ethnic groups; anti-poverty, disability rights advocates; and LGBTQIA advocates. Our coalition includes elders, students, parents, educators and organizations.

Between November 2017 and January 2018 the VCESES solidified and began its groundbreaking work of drafting the Ethnic Studies and Social Equity Working Group bill and finding an ally in the legislature. This idea was inspired by the pioneering work of Oregon's Ethnic Studies Coalition in passing HB 2845, which established statewide Ethnic Studies for Oregon K-12.

On January 31, H.794 was introduced by Representatives Kiah Morris, Selene Colburn, and Kevin Coach Christy, and quickly gained momentum and popularity as a priority piece of legislation for individuals, educators, and families statewide. The bill narrowly missed passage in the 2017-2018 legislative session, but has been made a top priority of leadership in the house and senate for the upcoming session.

GOALS:

1. Advance legislation that establishes an advisory group that
 - represents public education stakeholders and includes eight members of ethnic and social equity groups chosen by VCESES; and
 - reviews state mandated curriculum standards, recommend changes, and additional standards to include the histories and contributions of underrepresented and excluded groups.
 - may review all existing State statutes regarding school policies and recommend to the General Assembly proposed statutory changes.
2. Organize communities around the state to:
 - expose instances of racism, xenophobia, ableism, homophobia and transphobia by empowering communities to share their stories.
 - bridge movements (racial justice, anti-poverty, and immigrant, LGBTQIA, and disability rights) to drive a comprehensive look at the inequality in curriculum standards in Vermont.
 - empower people for immediate action to advance legislation, motivate policymakers to be proactive, and support this long term effort of enhancing our education system for all students
3. Build community-driven efforts where:
 - communities are trained to begin conversations with teachers, administrators and school boards about their school district curriculums and policies
 - community members motivate local schools and policymakers to be proactive and support this long term effort of changing our education system
 - communities are empowered to demand changes in their school curriculum.

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BACKGROUND AND GOALS



BACKGROUND

As a state that is consistently one of the whitest in the nation, Vermont's indigenous people and people of other races are often forgotten or excluded, and therefore become invisible when it comes to discourse of any kind. Vermont's education system is no exception. Due to this lack of representation and visibility, there is no structural system of checks and balances; in report after report, instances of racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and class-based discrimination and harassment have not been dealt with systematically. Concerns are blatantly disregarded, minimized, and ignored because officials either do not know how to, or do not want to deal with the complexity and pain borne of discrimination and oppression.

The lack of attention to the histories and contributions of non-dominant racial, ethnic, and social groups in school curriculums contributes to the marginalization of members of these groups, and leads to a standard of miseducation for all students. Including the history and contributions of people from more diverse racial, ethnic, and social identities can enrich students' achievement, positive identity development, and sense of awareness and connectedness to local,

➤ In 1999, the Vermont Advisory Committee (VAC) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a report titled *Racial Harassment in Vermont Public Schools* that described the state of racism in public schools. VAC held various hearings, 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, VAC released a follow-up report concluding that problems persisted despite some improvements since the initial report. Curriculums remained a key issue; "...teachers employ curriculum materials and lesson plans that promote racial stereotypes." In response, the report called for a development of bias-free curriculum

➤ In December 2017, the Act 54 *Racial Disparities in State Systems* report was released by the Attorney General and Human Rights Commission Task Force. According to the report, education is one of the five state systems in which racial disparities persist and need to be addressed.

BACKGROUND AND PEOPLE AT THE TABLE

The Attorney General and Human Rights Commission held three stakeholder meetings and found “a surprising amount of coalescence around the most important issues”, and “the primary overarching theme was...to reduce racial disparities by changing the underlying culture of our state with regard to race. A target area 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.” Additionally, the group recommended educating State employees about implicit bias, white privilege, white fragility, and white supremacy; increasing the representation of people of color (POC) in the State and school labor forces by focusing on recruitment, hiring, and retention; and promoting POC into positions of authority and responsibility on boards and commissions.

CAMPAIGN WORKING GROUP COMMITTEE

Nico Amador - ALCU Of Vermont

Melissa Battah - Community member, Barre VT

Marita Canedo - Migrant Justice

Alyssa Chen - Black Lives Matter of Greater Burlington

Brenda Churchill and Keith Goslant- LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont

Wafic Faour - Palestinian American Activist - Vermonters for Justice in Palestine

Carlen Finn - Voices For Vermont Children

Amanda Garces - Founder VCESES

Alexa Gabriel - Pre-K educator

Steffen Gillom - NAACP Windham County

Tom Hamilton - Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council

Kiah Morris - Former state Representative

Tabitha Pohl-Moore - NAACP Rutland

Weiwei Wang - Peace and Justice Center

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Katrina Battle - Milton Inclusion & Diversity Initiative

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Mark Hughes - Justice for All

Christine Longmore and Infinite Cucleasure - Parents youth for Change

Shela Linton - The Root

Sha'an Moulert - I am VT Too

Hope Petraro - Racial Justice Alliance

Sarika Tandon - Equity Consultant

Chief Don Stevens - Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation

Jade Walker - School Counselor

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PEOPLE AT THE TABLE



CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

ACLU of Vermont
Black Lives Matter of Greater Burlington
Community Council of Accountability with Law Enforcement Officials
Central Vermont Showing Up for Racial Justice
Justice For All
Thaddeus Stevens School
Migrant Justice
Milton Inclusion and Diversity Initiative
NAACP - Rutland

NAACP - Windham County
Outright Vermont
Parents Youth for Change
Peace and Justice Center
Rights and Democracy
Stand Up for Social Justice
Vermont State Independent Living Council
Vermonters for Justice in Palestine
Voices for Vermont Children

We have thousands of supporters and endorsers of the Ethnic studies and social Equity Bill. This is why they support our efforts...

"I grew up in Hyde Park Vermont and was totally unprepared to engage in anti-racist work as a white person. I never learned anything about racism in high school except a brief unit on the Civil Rights Movement and I think that is shameful. Vermont needs to educate it's young people in order to address the racial injustices across the state. Uneducated youth are complacent youth and complacency cannot be afforded when it comes to power, privilege and oppression. We must rise up together to demand that all of us are treated with love, respect and humanity. Racism is a scourge on everyone, not just people of color, for it denies our humanity as people." Sonya Buglion Gluck, Burlington

"It's vital that students have an education that stretched beyond the west because it's vital that non-white students learn about their histories in the same way that white students do and because understanding these histories and cultures is vital for students to understand and engage with a globalized world." Grace Viscito, Shelburne

" Vermont has the chance to spark a generational change among our young people. Education about under-discussed chapters of our history and under-recognized people of our state has the potential to instill students with the kind of empathy across difference that comes from an understanding of shared history." Jack Braunstein, Burlington

Find more responses on our website