

Vermont Coalition for Vermont Coalition on Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Who is VCESES?

The Vermont Coalition on Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools or VCESES is a statewide coalition led by a multicultural and multigenerational group including people of color from various racial, ethnic and indigenous groups; women; and anti-poverty, disability rights, and LGBTQIA advocates. Founded in 2017, the coalition includes elders, students, parents, educators and organizations from throughout Vermont. VCESES was the driving force behind the recent passage of Act 1, the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards bill.

Together, we are working with communities across the state to create plans to support youth, families, educators, and schools to understand the need for curriculum that represents diverse histories and accomplishments and school climates that are supportive of the needs of all students to achieve their best.

What is Act 1?

Act 1 is a new Vermont law that brings together the members of the public from different ethnic and social backgrounds, the state and the education community to help tackle bias, discrimination, and inequity in Vermont Schools. The goal is to help schools to support better the needs of youth who are underrepresented like:

- women and girls
- youth with disabilities
- immigrants
- refugees
- LGBTQIA
- Abenaki
- people from other indigenous groups
- people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicanx, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent
- groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide

What does the law do?

The law creates a 20-person group called the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group that will review educational standards and policies in Vermont schools and create suggestions for improvement that can be accepted by the state and selected by schools for use on a local level.

These suggestions will go to the [Vermont State Board of Education](#) to review and adopt if they agree with the findings.

Is this a mandate for schools?

It does not force or “mandate” that any school uses a specific curriculum or lesson plans. Those choices are still made in your local community and not by the state.

So what are “standards?”

Standards are what help schools determine what they will teach. Standards set expectations for what students need to know in different subjects like mathematics, social studies, sciences, language arts, and more. Schools decide on the books, activities, and other learning tools they will use based on the requirements laid out in the state standards.

This new law and the results of the working group are important tools – **but they are not enough**. We need parents, youth, and community members to dive in and support their schools in preparing for these needed changes through education and involvement.

What about hazing, harassment, and bullying in Vermont schools?

In 2012, the Agency of Education established a [Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying Prevention Advisory Council](#) to address “incidents of harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention strategies and resources; and to coordinate statewide activities related to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing, and bullying. The council reports annually in January to the Vermont State Board of Education and the house and senate committees on education.” To prevent harassment, hazing, and bullying, it is important to address the root causes which include creating more inclusive, non-discriminatory school environments. The recommendations from the working group may include suggested training for teachers, administrators, and staff, and revisions of current practices in reporting and addressing incidents of hazing, harassment, and bullying against students from different ethnic and social groups. Many of the members of the Harassment, Hazing and Bullying Prevention Council will also serve on the working group created by Act 1.

About the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group

Act 1 created the Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group to support this work. In total, the working group will include 20 people from throughout the state. VCESSES will lead the effort to recruit and select 11 individuals; 8 adults, two high school students and one Vermont-based, college-level faculty expert in ethnic studies for the working group from throughout the state.

Who are the appointees to the working group?

- Asma Elhuni- White River Junction
- Barbra Marden - Shelburne
- Bruce Pandya (Youth Appointee) - U32 HS
- Celilo Bauman-Swain (Youth Appointee) - Champlain Valley Union HS
- Cynthia Reyes (Faculty Appointee) - Williston
- Infinite Culcleasure - Burlington
- Mara Iverson - Montpelier
- Mark Hage - Montpelier
- Maxwell Barrows - Montpelier
- Miakoda Schultz - Bennington
- Vera Sheehan - Westtown

Other members of the working group who were selected by their organizations include:

- Agency of Education Designee: Deputy Secretary Heather Bouchey
- Vermont-National Education Association - Natasha Eckart Baning, paraeducator at Paine Mountain School District / Central Vermont Supervisory Union
- State of Vermont Executive Director of Racial Equity: Xusana Davis
- Vermont School Board Association: Heather Thomas Lynn
- Vermont Principals Association: Bonnie Johnson-Aten
- Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association: Jade Hazard, Director of Curriculum, Lamoille North SU/SD -
- Vermont Superintendents Association: Chelsea Myers, Director of Professional Development and
- Vermont Independent Schools Association: Amber Wylie
- Vermont Human Rights Commission: Amanda Garces