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For Immediate Release

State Board of Education Exempts Private Schools from State Required Education Quality Standards

Vermont-NEA Says the Board's Move Points to Immediate Need for Legislature to Stop Flow of Taxpayer Dollars to Private Schools

RUTLAND – In voting to exempt private schools that receive public vouchers from the latest education quality standards, the State Board of Education today provided yet another example of why the legislature must end the practice of sending the public's money to unaccountable private schools.

The board – a majority of whom are private school advocates – made it clear that it doesn't see the need to hold private schools to the same high standards required of public schools, according to Vermont-NEA.

“What the board didn't say, but certainly knows, is that by exempting approved private schools from the mandate to provide an education that is substantially equal it also exempted these schools from providing an education that is equitable, anti-racist, culturally responsive, anti-discriminatory, and inclusive,” said Don Tinney, a veteran English teacher who serves as the elected president of Vermont-NEA.

“Sadly, the board has effectively sanctioned a separate but unequal education system for a significant number of students outside our public schools. In doing so, it will expose these children to a higher risk of inequitable and discriminatory treatment and substandard curricular requirements and teaching practices.”

The new education quality standards are the result of more than two years of evaluation and discussion by the Act 1 Working Group, a diverse group of stakeholders charged by the legislature and Gov. Phil Scott to eradicate racial bias and to ensure that the standards are inclusive, anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, equitable, and culturally responsive. The legislation creating the working group also directed that the revised education quality standards apply to all schools receiving public money. All but one member of the working group – which included Vermont-NEA – agreed with applying the standards to private schools receiving public money; the lone dissent was the Vermont Independent Schools Association. The state board, in voting to exempt private schools from the standards, is flouting the spirit of the law.

“The board is essentially telling private schools that they can keep taking lots of public money, but they don't have to meet the same high standards as public schools,” Tinney said. “What's even more troubling is that private schools don't have to ensure that students of all ancestries and social groups feel safe, respected, and welcome.”



THE UNION OF VERMONT EDUCATORS

The question of how to reset public funding of K-12 education was a major topic in this year's legislative session because of the US Supreme Court's decision in *Carson v. Makin*. This decision, released almost a year ago, said that states that allow taxpayer vouchers to be used at private schools must make taxpayer dollars available to all private schools, even religious ones.

The decision upended Vermont's 1860s-era voucher scheme that has allowed towns without their own public schools to give taxpayer funded vouchers to students to attend nearby public or private schools. The decision has already allowed taxpayer funding of religious schools, many of whom boldly refuse to attest that they will be free of discrimination.

Vermont-NEA believes that the legislature has a simple choice, Tinney said. "There's a solution to this violation of the Vermont Constitution's requirement for the separation of church and state. And there's a solution to funding discrimination with public money – restrict taxpayer dollars from going anywhere but our public schools."

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