

**This document includes a printable version of Maggie Reynolds' VTDigger story about the tik tok video and the CVU basketball team, on pages 2&3. One approach could be to have students read the article and make simple annotations: 3 key facts, 3 reactions, 3 places that raise a question, etc.*

Vermont's students have talked about this story for more than two weeks, mostly focused on the details of the case, with an eye to forming a personal judgment: What exactly happened on the Tik Tok video? What exactly were the consequences for the students involved?

But this isn't the discussion we want to have in the Underground Workshop, because...

1. Hopefully we can agree that the video itself was racist and wrong to post.
2. Whatever our views of the consequences they faced, these students have been discussed enough.
3. This incident is just one among many. We're interested in the big picture, considering this event in context, alongside all of the other stories that relate to our question this week:

To what degree does social media empower young Vermonters to advance social justice?

A suggested classroom activity:

1. Quietly, as individuals, consider this question and come up with a rating, from 1-10, with a one meaning that social media is failing to empower students at all, and a ten representing full empowerment. (We'll all think about this question differently--what is "empowerment"?-- but that's the point)
2. (after a minute or two of thinking time) Hold up the number of fingers to show your rating, quietly-- but hold off on speaking for a minute more.
3. Quietly, think about your rating again. All of us have specific experiences and examples behind our numbers-- probably a mix of positive and negative experiences. Prepare to share a couple of these.

The Underground Workshop is seeking evidence-based commentaries. Here you're speaking in the same format: share an example, then discuss it in relation to the discussion question.

The relevance of these issues makes the conversation lively, important, and also difficult. Make sure to lay some ground rules: no stories about specific students, no rumor or hearsay, etc. There's a lot that goes on in students' lives online that just can't be discussed safely, in any classroom. But there's also a lot that's fair game....

These resources are meant to be simple and user-friendly, with enough to support teachers framing the discussion but not enough for a full lesson. If you have feedback or suggestions please email undergroundworkshop@vtdigger.org.

Protesting racist behavior, basketball teams decline to play Champlain Valley and Enosburg

By Maggie Reynolds Jan 13 2023

The Burlington girls' basketball team postponed a game against Champlain Valley Union High School after one of its players used a racial slur in a TikTok video.

And on Thursday afternoon, Enosburg Falls High School [announced via Facebook](#) that the varsity and junior varsity girls' basketball games against Middlebury, scheduled for that day, had been canceled because of Enosburg student spectators' racially inappropriate comments toward Middlebury players.

Champlain Valley Principal Adam Bunting issued an apology letter to Vermont students on Thursday after the Burlington team's decision.

Calling the student-athlete's video "racially insensitive — at best," Bunting wrote that, "Because she made the video with a family member who is a person of color, she wrongly believed it was okay to post something that used the N-word."

Although the video was taken down an hour after it was posted, it was widely circulated among students across the state, according to Bunting.

Bunting said he met with members of the Burlington team and school administration on Wednesday before agreeing to postpone the game scheduled for Thursday evening. "We listened, we shared our perspectives, and we discussed a path forward together," he wrote in his memo, titled "Open Letter to Vermont Students."

"We agreed to play our next game after our restorative process has had a chance to be completed; after all, an apology without learning is hollow at best," he continued.

Seven Days [reported](#) that Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington also postponed varsity and junior varsity games with the school, and according to Bunting's letter, players at other high schools around the state have expressed plans to forfeit their games as well.

Bunting urged them to reconsider: "Before you make this move, I'd ask for your trust and remind you that the review of our policies is my responsibility — not our players'. I ask you to trust that this player has and is experiencing consequences about which you don't know."

At an individual level, the process includes taking punitive action against the player who made the video, while also addressing why she made it and those who were harmed in the process, Bunting told VTDigger.

The player lost her captaincy, was suspended from gameplay and removed from leadership clubs in school, Bunting wrote in the letter.

He added that the school must walk a fine line between holding the player accountable for her mistake and recognizing that people, particularly young adults, can engage in restorative practices and eventually be forgiven for their insensitive actions.

On a broader level, Champlain Valley intends to host a forum for the girls basketball community across the state to learn together and foster productive dialogue. Coming out of Thursday's conversation, the Champlain Valley and Burlington High School teams plan to have a smaller discussion with one another about diversity, equity and inclusion work and harm mitigation.

"We are being really thoughtful about the restorative practice we are going through," Bunting said. "And we are asking for some time to go through this process."

Champlain Valley is also working with the Vermont Principals' Association, the state's governing body for school sports, to develop model procedures for situations such as these, where racial harm has been inflicted.

Jay Nichols, executive director of the association, said Champlain Valley addressed the incident swiftly and professionally, making it clear to everybody that it will not tolerate behavior like that of the player.

Enosburg cancellation

According to the post made by administrators on the Enosburg Falls High School Facebook page, Enosburg students have engaged in "racially inappropriate comments and taunting" toward the Middlebury team during two incidents over the past year. One student [was disciplined](#) after such an event in February 2022, the school confirmed last year.

"Those instances have shown that not every student has been safe to visit EFHS and perform at their best," the statement read. "We know the devastating lifelong effects that racism and bias have on the mental and physical well-being and lifetime success of students."

The post went on to state that the school will make an effort to be good hosts and provide a welcoming atmosphere for all guests at the team's remaining games this season.

The decision to skip the game in Enosburg came directly from the students on the Middlebury girls' basketball team, Peter Burrows, superintendent of the Addison Central School District, told VTDigger by email. The team had been meeting with school administration over the course of the season and underwent "considerable reflection" to come to this decision, he added.

Despite these incidents of racism coming to the forefront of Vermont girls' basketball in such close succession, Nichols said he does not believe they are evidence of an overall increase in racially inappropriate behavior on the state sports scene.

Rather, he suggested it is a result of increased reporting of incidents to the Vermont Principals' Association. "There is definitely a lot more willingness to report stuff like this. And we are proud of that," he said.

Through the association's new "reporting a concern" [form on its website](#), anybody can report an incident at a sporting event. The form was instituted last year after [multiple episodes of racist and hateful language](#) at school sports games across the state.

"(These) are fairly isolated events," Nichols added. "We think we are seeing less of these events than maybe were occurring in the past."