

Vermont Principals' Association

Supporting Leaders & Learners

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March 15th, 2023

Testimony for House Education, H.416, Educator Workforce Bill

VPA Representative: Mike McRaith

Dear House Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this issue again in this session. Your attention to our public school educator workforce is vitally important. There are many important issues that need your support in Vermont education, and I believe that this one is as fundamental as any. Without attending to the workforce shortages, other efforts and initiatives will lack the foundation necessary to make progress. I especially appreciate the opportunity to speak to recommendations on H.416 to include attention and resources to diversifying our public school educator workforce. In that regard, I remind house education of the testimony given on February 24th from Mikaela Simms, Jonathan Phipps and myself.

- [Testimony in House Education for Diversifying the Educator Workforce & Youtube Version 2/24/23](#)

My recommendations for edits to the current version of H.416 are as follows

Section 1: Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive Program

- Page 3, in the list of determining students eligible for student loan forgiveness there is no mechanism to prioritize financial need. It only requires that a student has completed the FAFSA. The FAFSA is its own hurdle for marginalized populations. That aside, the current language leaves the possibility that a college student with low financial need may be considered at the same priority as a college student with high financial need. Please add, "Prioritization will be given to applicants with demonstrated financial need".
- Page 4, line 5: list out which schools in Vermont are considered an "eligible school", and recommend including *Spark* in that list.

- Page 5, line 19, 20: add “outreach and specific support for engaging in the program to underrepresented demographics in the educator workforce”
- The funding is to come from the general fund. Here is some estimated math on the number of students this could serve.

2,500,000 -175,000 fiscal agent (7% to VSAC) = 2,325,000 in FY24
 UVM *in-State* Tuition for 30 credits = \$16,280

This means that the current FY24 proposed appropriation could serve 143 students with **one year** of tuition forgiveness at the in-state UVM tuition rate. If that appropriation must account for all four years, it serves around 35 students. This does not account for the out of state tuition rate or variance in cost among eligible Vermont education prep programs.

Section 2: Peer Review Support Grant Program; Report

- Change the heading of the section to “Non-Traditional Pathways Program”. The abbreviated rationale is to expand the possibility of creativity and flexibility in supporting peer-review and other strategies and pathways.
- Page 5, Lines 11 to 16 to read (edits in green)
 - (1) Program ~~creation~~ **support**. In fiscal year 2023, there is established the ~~Peer Review Support~~ **Non-Traditional Pathways** Grant Program, to be administered by the Agency of Education, to provide grants to **develop** expand support, mentoring, data collection, and professional development to prospective educators seeking licensure through the Agency of Education’s ~~peer review process~~ **Non-Traditional Pathways including Peer Review, Transcript Review, Emergency, Provisional, and Apprentice pathways** with the goals of increased program completion rates and increased rates of licensure for underrepresented demographics.
- Page 6, Line 1 and 2: ~~peer review program~~ **non-traditional pathways** the support necessary for successful completion of the ~~peer review process by providing~~ **following but not limited to:**

Line 13: ~~Peer Review~~ **Non-Traditional Pathways**

Section 3

- No changes. Ending the fees will help reduce barriers for marginalized populations

Section 4

- Strike, The Standards board has already achieved 50 state reciprocity

New Section

Diversifying the Educator Workforce

In addition to the above edits to improve access and support for diversifying the educator workforce, I am proposing the following additions to the bill under a new section.

- A) The Agency of Education will collect demographic information from educators with transparency of its expressed purpose of improving the longstanding and well documented issue of under-representation of educators of color in Vermont. The Agency will be provided with necessary appropriations to collect and analyze the given data.
- B) *(Testimony needs to be heard from the Agency of Education regarding their current upcoming report from APA on metrics of current educator workforce issues in Vermont and in regards to what they need in order to achieve this data collection).*
- C) Dedicated Personnel at the Agency of Education (and necessary appropriation for grants and budget) to focus on supporting Educator Workforce issues, with specific attention to Diversifying the Educator Workforce. This role will be a new role, with a budget and job responsibilities to include:
 - a) Building and maintaining a *Teach Vermont* educator recruitment website along the lines of <https://connecticut.teach.org/>
 - b) Serving as collector of recruitment and retention best practices for districts to reference
 - c) Lead and network statewide efforts and convenings to meet the goals of sustaining educators of color as [recommended](#) by the Vermont Educators of Color Association.
 - d) Convene networking opportunities on regional and local initiatives on workforce development programs to work collectively and collaboratively.
 - e) Lead a group of representative stakeholders for statewide recommendations for continued development and comprehensive programming on recruitment and retention of educators, including educators of color.
 - f) Lead a grant process to support existing and developing relevant [affinity groups](#) in the state.

Total Recommended Appropriation \$400,000 for FY2024.

In addition to the above technical recommendations to H.416 I recommend:

- The bill will be reviewed by additional stakeholders with additional testimony, with special attention to educators of color in Vermont.
- I recommend discussion and legislative action and a significant appropriation for the implementation of ACT 1 of 2019. In countless research papers and in countless conversations with educators of color—attending to the environment is as important

as anything in recruitment and retention efforts. The recommendations of the ACT 1 working group to the Educational Quality Standards, if/when adopted, will provide an excellent opportunity to attend to that environment. Roll out and adoption by local districts will need statewide leadership in professional learning in order to do so with fidelity.