

Lighthouse Evaluation



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TO: Members of the Vermont Legislature

FR: Bud Meyers

DA: April 17, 2024

RE: Testimony before the Vermont House Education Committee

Introduction:

My name is Bud Meyers. I have been a resident of Vermont since 1971 when I joined the faculty of the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. I taught quantitative research methods and educational policy and leadership courses from 1971 through 2013. During that time, on a leave of absence from UVM, I served as Deputy Commissioner of Education for Standards and Assessment, from 2000 through 2006. I was privileged to advise Governors and Commissioners on education policy matters from the administration of Governor Hoff to the present. From 2008 until 2013 I served as director of Senator Jeffords' James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research at UVM. During that time my colleague, John Rogers and I submitted a report on equity to the Vermont Legislature. (*Full Report: Educational Opportunities Working Group on Aligning Funding, Opportunities to Learn and Outcomes of the Educational System.*) This report presents the findings and discussion from a study by the James M. Jeffords Center responding to questions indicated by Act 156 of 2012, Section 31, of the Vermont Legislature.

Excellence in Reading Instruction: A Step Forward.

Two important bills have been discussed during the spring 2024 session of the Vermont Legislature. Senate Bill S. 204, *An Act Relating to Reading Assessment and Intervention*, is a good piece of legislation that provides many needed elements to strengthen and support literacy instruction. S. 204 is grounded in the Science of Reading and calls for systemic change in Vermont education. A second bill, H. 826, untitled, but focused on literacy, educator preparation, reading screening and curriculum is a somewhat more comprehensive proposed bill. Either bill, if passed, would improve Vermont's reading instruction. However, neither bill provides a certain mechanism that would ensure that all Vermont students will have access to the high-quality instruction proposed. Both bills acknowledge that the Legislature has the responsibility to ensure equity in the opportunities that all students have to learn to read. The growth of Vermont's economy and the welfare of future generations depends upon an effective educational system.

A Needed Additional Element for Systemic Change of Effective Reading Instruction.

S. 204 provides for the implementation of its provisions by the Agency of Education and annual evaluation by the Legislature. Specific language requiring annual reports of effectiveness from the school districts to the Agency and an Agency report to the legislature is contained on pages 5-6 of the Bill. However, missing from the specifications of reporting is the disaggregation of proficiency outcome data by income, disability status, historically underserved groups, race and gender. All of the needed data for reports of the proficiency of these groups are contained in existing Agency of Education and US Department of Education publicly available annual data sets. H. 826 provides for a Reading Outcome Report, page 14, but the provisions do not require the disaggregation of any sub-groups of students.

The disaggregation of student performance data by income, disability status and other groups will enable equity to emerge as a goal and commitment of the Legislature.

Recently, the Vermont AOE released the assessment results for the 22-23 Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program (VTCAP) state assessment on the Agency website:

<https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiZDFmMjM1YmYtN2VhZS00NzhhLThiMTMtY2Y5NmU2ZDg2OGE3IiwidCI6IjIwYjQ5MzNiLWJhYWQtNDMzYy05YzAyLTcwZWRjYzclNTljNiJ9>

In addition, on the AOE website, there is also a link to the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) that may also be used as an indicator of equity.

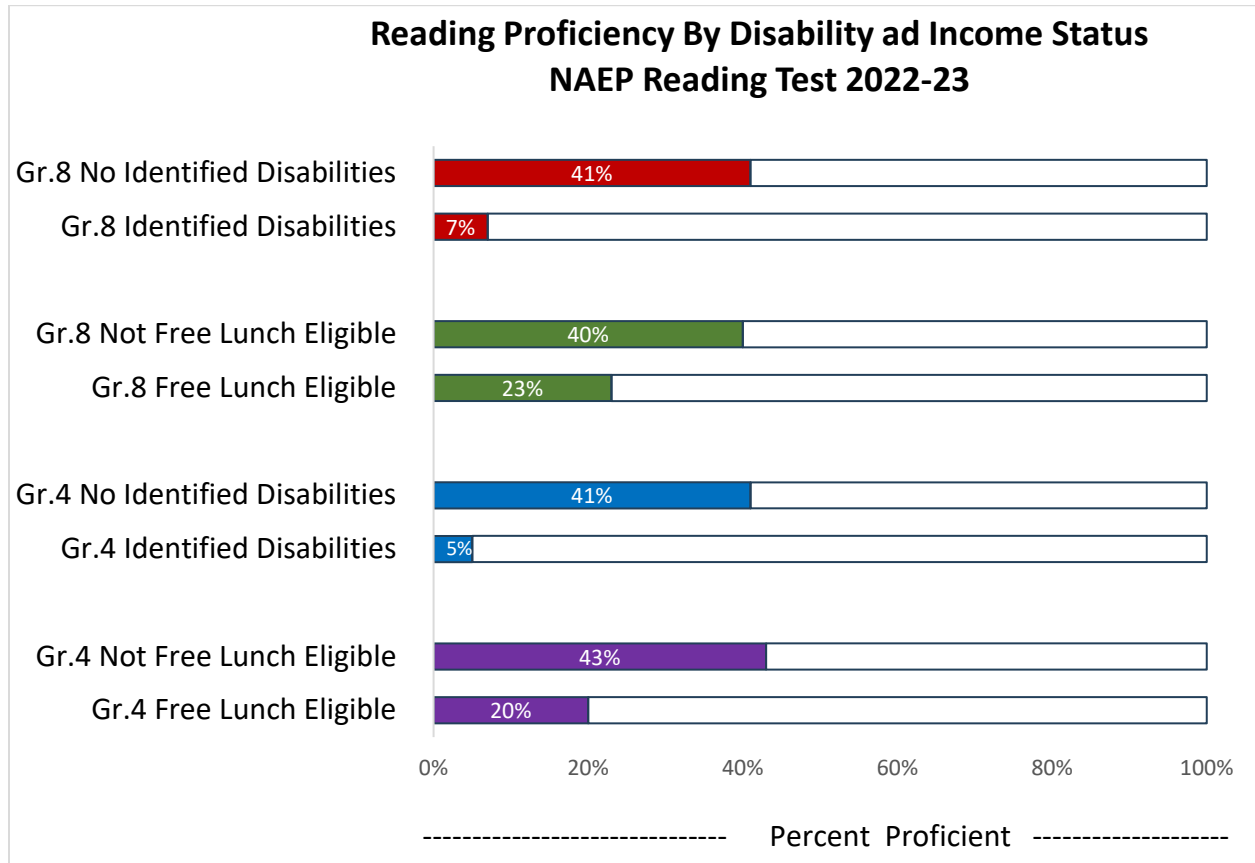
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE>

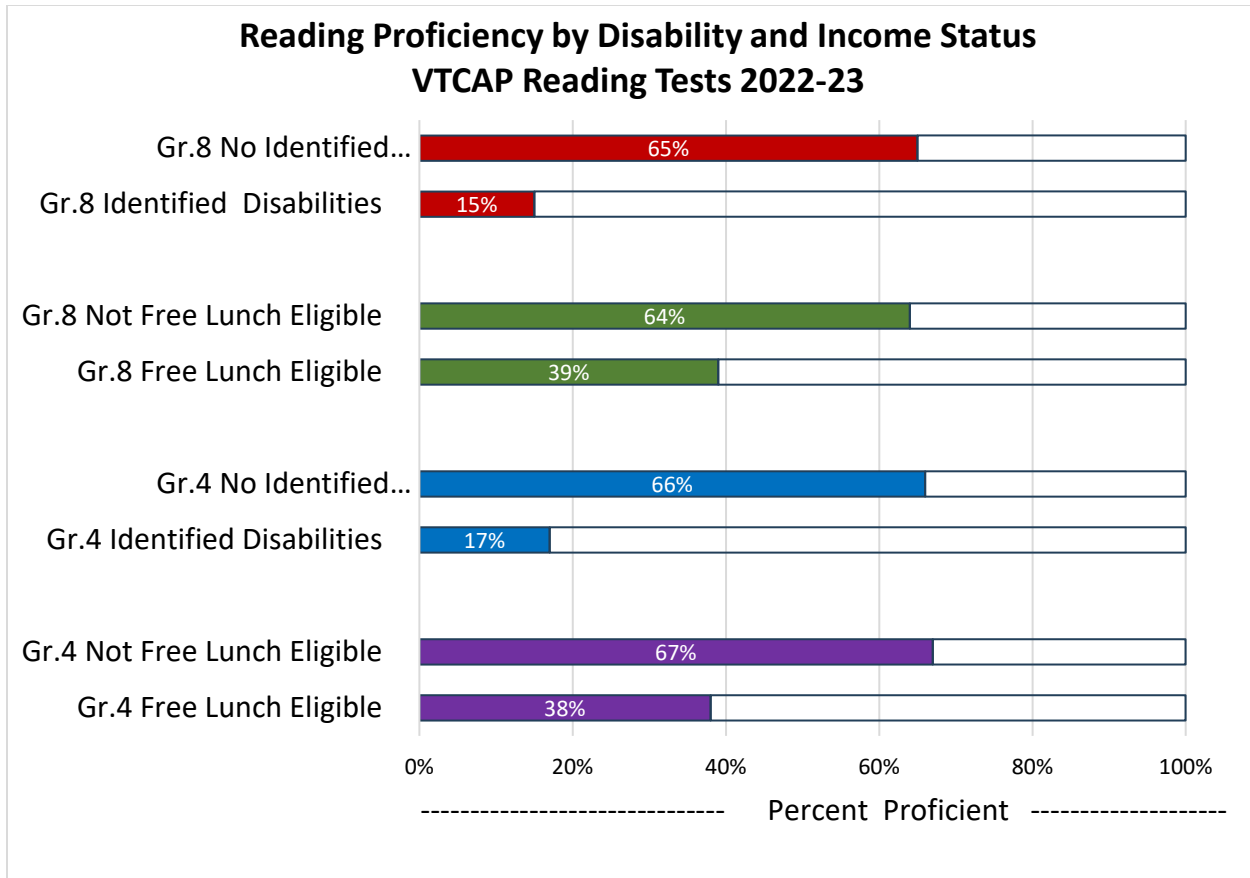
Student performance on both measures, when tracked over time, reveals a growing relative lack of proficiency in reading among groups of students with disabilities or lower family income. State and federal reports over the past two decades clearly show increasing disparity in the performance of historically underserved groups of students. In general, about twenty percent fewer students score proficient on the NAEP than on the VTCAP. VTCAP scores may reflect a closer match with curriculum currently taught in Vermont schools and are thus somewhat higher. NAEP scores have the advantage of being comparable with other states.

The measures of reading performance in the VTCAP and NAEP tests are different. That is to say that they represent different test technologies, test questions, time of testing and test frameworks. However, they are similar in that they both measure student performance in the domain of reading.

As you will see in the charts below, the gaps in student performance show similar patterns between pairs of groups of low income vs. other students and disabled vs. other students for both the VTCAP and NAEP tests. These charts illustrate a pattern of inequity that has been the experience of Vermonters for generations. Both of these sources of student performance data can be used to describe the relative proficiency of groups that should, under an equity goal for all students, perform relatively equally. Recognizing that some groups, disabled students for example, may require more time and resources than are currently available in some schools, it

may be reasonable to expect that achieving equity of outcomes may require more time. However, gaps between these groups should not be allowed to increase. The gaps for each group are identified by comparing the bar lines for each group. Charts are presented as NAEP first and VTCAP second.





Parents, administrators, teachers, and all citizens can use this information to guide policy and decisions about teaching methods and curriculum at the school level. Having these data available and published raises the question about the status of progress on the goal of equity and the provision of equal educational opportunity to learn to read.

The Time to Act is Now.

This year the Vermont Legislature has a timely opportunity to improve instruction for all students by providing incentives, guidance, and direction to guarantee that the instruction all students receive is the best-known instruction to obtain results that enable all students to learn to read by grade 3 and to maintain a high level of reading proficiency throughout their lives. Failure to guarantee effective reading instruction now will continue the widening of gaps between those who have access to excellence in education and those who do not.

This year's effort to enact legislation that will improve the education of all Vermonters follows several years of attempts to transform the system of education from less to more equality of educational opportunity and higher quality of instruction. From the Vermont Design for Education of the 1970's to efforts to establish accountability for public investment in education of the past two decades, there have been several attempts to improve equity in education policy.

As recent as 2012, a forum was held at the Capital Plaza (January 17, 2012) attended by a cross-section of stakeholders. Stakeholders included the Vermont Business Roundtable, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont National Education Association, Vermont Principals' Association, Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association and the Stern Center for Language and Learning. The forum resulted in a paper, The *Vermont Blueprint to Close the Achievement Gap*. I have attached the Blueprint. There is an additional related blueprint (*Blueprint for Early Literacy Comprehensive System of Services, PreK Through Third Grade Vermont Agency of Education July 9, 2019*). I have submitted this blueprint as well. It is mainly consistent with the former blueprint but provides more detail.

Vermont as a state has an enviable record of citizen participation in government. From the historic democratic Town Meetings to the inclusion of citizen representation on boards of regulation, rule-making, planning and study, citizens who are at the same time responsible for the implementation of policy are heard in the governance process. Unlike autocratic procedures often enforced on citizens in other states and nations, Vermont takes pride in local control. There are good reasons to support these shared processes of governance that protect citizens from invasions of privacy and waste of resources. Elected representatives of all Vermont citizens can provide the framework for the guarantee of equity for all students.

Please let me know if I can be of further help.

Best,

Bud Meyers