

**To:**House Committee on Education

**From:** Rep. Brady, Vice Chair House Committee on Education

**Re:** Introduction to H. 820

**Introduction:** When I applied for graduate school 19 years ago to become a teacher I wrote in my application essay that I believe public education is the most important institution we have to create a more just and equal society and to close opportunity gaps. Now, I have the extraordinary privilege of serving in this body and sitting on this committee and I am committed to making policy that works towards that ideal.

As a social studies teacher, I am always striving to help students contextualize our subject matter and learning topics. I think it's important for us to consider the broader context of public discourse and concern about education, about the wellbeing of young people at this point in time and an extremely difficult and complex school budget season ahead of us.

We know education spending in Vermont is extremely high and continues to grow, possibly unsustainably. This committee and other committees in this body are currently trying to "look under the hood" of our complex system from every angle. This includes a more careful look at how much we are relying on schools to provide social services, what our massive facilities backlog means for the system and individual budgets, why teacher healthcare costs are rising at such exorbitant rates, how policies we enacted (including Act 46, Act 173 and Act 127) are creating change in our system and where that implementation might be falling short of the intent and what US Supreme Court decisions might mean for our system.

Furthermore, many of us are concerned about a lack of capacity at our Agency of Education to support our schools, which are our biggest statewide investment. And yet for so many issues we look at in this committee, we get stuck between what is best for the 83,000 students in public schools **and** how we will also apply the same to Vermont students who attended independent schools on public education dollars. Our State Board of Education has done great work in trying to create rules that work towards this but again, we are in a strained system on so many levels and it does not serve the overall system to be spending resources (financial and time) on a multi track system.

All of this is to say, it seems to me like the context of all of our discussions around education right now have one central theme - the status quo may not be a viable option.

**The bill:** So, let's turn to H. 820:

In short, this is a bill to put some fences around our public education dollars by having districts that do not operate a school designate up to 5 (not a magic #) schools for sending their students

**The purpose of this bill is to support and invest in Vermont public schools that serve all children, strengthen community assets, and keep Vermont tax dollars in Vermont.**

I will now walk through the standards of what a school would need to do to be an approved independent school eligible to receive public tuition and thus able to be designated under this bill. All of these requirements already exist in our public schools. This begins on page 17

1. Be a nonprofit school located in Vermont (*I acknowledge that this requirement would need some work in order to accommodate for a couple places in the state where the most logical school for students might be a public school just across the state border. However, I am confident that it is a matter we can address and stop sending public education dollars to ski schools in the western United States or boarding schools in Europe.*)
2. Accept students on IEPs
3. Comply with Vermont Public Accommodations Act & the Vermont Fair Employment Practices Act (this requirement is now in the 2200 rules; this puts it in statute)
4. Meet the Education Quality Standards
5. Employ licensed teachers
6. Maintain a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)
7. Adopt an alcohol & drug policy consistent with the State Board's rule
8. Adopt a disciplinary policy consistent with the State Board's rule
9. Notify the truant officer pursuant to section 1126
10. Receive State Board of Education approval

**Conclusion:** This approach could move us forward better by:

- Pooling resources to strengthen and maximize the impact of every available dollar;
- Minimizing duplication of programs, personnel and services;
- Supporting consistent and quality implementation of mandated programs;
- Ensuring that students in every district have substantially equitable opportunities to learn.

**I said this on the floor last year when we took up H. 483 and will repeat it** - On the school board where I served for many years, we went through a lengthy strategic mission process and I was a little bit cynical about the undertaking and I've been equally cynical when we did similar work in district where I teach because we spend a lot of time in these processes trying to find just

slightly different words to say the same thing: the mission of public education is to support **all** kids, to teach **all** kids, to create opportunity for **all** kids.