
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: Heather Bouchey, Interim Secretary of Education
Subject: **Flexible Pathways and Remote Learning**
Date: February 23, 2024

Act 166, section 7 from 2022 directed the Agency of Education (AOE) to develop a recommendation for statewide remote learning policy that incorporates remote learning into preexisting requirements for student attendance, school days, and cumulative instructional hours. We view S.824 as a follow-up to that directive and fully support the bill.

As written, we believe the bill will establish remote learning as a fully-fledged learning pathway in the Flexible Pathways Initiative pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 941. Currently, remote learning is an option for students to take advantage of through the Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative. However, clearer articulation of the program within statute will achieve equity in implementation throughout the state and will remove existing legal barriers to help students more easily access virtual learning.

The goal is to expand student participation in remote learning. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that learning online or other remote learning options may be a viable and even preferred option for some students. Currently remote learning implementation as a flexible learning pathway is reliant on somewhat fuzzy policy interpretation. The AOE requests additional statutory changes to fully clarify the legislature's intent and allow the AOE to best guide LEAs in offering virtual learning as a flexible pathway implementation.

We fully support the intention and language of the bill. We are happy to answer questions or assist the Committee in efforts to improve the bill.

