
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs

Subject: **DR 23-0909 – Senate Miscellaneous Education – Draft 5.1 Sec. 7 - Driver Education**

Date: March 14, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional testimony on Draft 5.1, Sec. 7 of the Senate Miscellaneous Education Bill.

My goal today is to provide a very brief overview of the challenges facing Vermont's school-based driver education system in hopes of clarifying some of the issues that are at play, and providing an update on some of the ongoing efforts to address the challenges.

To be clear, the Administration is only requesting the pilot study originally proposed by Secretary French. Many of the areas of effort I will outline are, for now at least, best undertaken outside of a legislative venue. To quote Secretary French: "we have a people problem, not a pipeline problem." It is this people problem, more specifically the lack of certified driver educators in some regions of Vermont, that led us to propose the pilot program.

We can provide additional testimony on ongoing efforts to address driver educator workforce issues at the committee's convenience, as well as a status update next session.

Current Challenges

Reviewing previous testimony and based on information available to AOE, we see three distinct, but related factors driving the driver educator workforce deficit:

Educator Development Pipeline

One of the factors driving the lack of driver educators is challenges with available educator preparation programs. Currently there is no active program in Vermont, and we understand that a program that was available in New Hampshire recently closed. Additionally, there are minor differences in licensing requirements between DMV and AOE.

AOE and DMV currently engaged in efforts to address these issues. AOE is looking into ways the licensing requirements can be changed to make it



easier for educators to enter the field and address differences in licensing between the in-school and private providers. Additionally, we are working with stakeholders in attempt to bring a driver educator preparation program back to Vermont.

Neither of these efforts is easily legislated, nor will additional legislative language assist us in these efforts. AOE would be happy to provide additional detail on our efforts, and pledges to keep the committee apprised should we identify helpful or necessary legislative changes.

Alternative Approaches

There may be potential additional or alternative approaches to facilitate individuals with expertise in driving or driver training attaining a driver educator license and joining the workforce. We have heard these potential approaches referred variously as “train the trainer,” or other alternative ideas for licensing.

An existing barrier to these approaches is our current licensing and educator development process, both at AOE and in DMV. Currently both AOE and DMV require six training courses to attain a driver educator certification. It is possible that changes to those requirements may be helpful to facilitate entry. However, what is not yet clear is:

- to what extent these requirements should be changed, understanding that we want Vermont driver educators to be well trained and able to safely deliver high quality driver education to Vermont students.
- how much un-tapped interest exists among highly qualified driver trainers who are not already driver educators. Put another way, it is not yet clear how many additional educators we can expect if we make some of the considered changes.

The ongoing efforts outlined above should give us more understanding of the possibilities for these programs, as well as provide solutions to address the problem. This is another area where we do not currently see a need for legislative action. Again, AOE would be happy to provide additional background information, and provide updates to the committee as needed.

Impact of the Driver Educator Shortage on Students

Regardless of the educator preparation challenges mentioned above; there remains an unmet need in many school systems around Vermont. School districts are not able to offer adequate driver education programs to all interested students due to a lack of driver educators.

As noted previously, there are two aspects to this problem: an in-classroom element that AOE is working to address by exploring online learning opportunities as previously outlined to the committee. We are also considering potential changes to educator licensure, as noted above, that would allow for licensed educators with endorsements outside of driver education to take on the classroom instruction.

With those efforts in progress, our remaining challenge becomes the ability to offer the in-car element of the instruction. AOE proposed a joint AOE and DMV pilot program to determine the feasibility of offering regional driver education clinics in place of district

offered in-car courses. Students would get the classroom portion of their instruction either virtually or at their home district, and then come together on a regional basis for the in-car clinics. This model is based on DMV's highly successful motorcycle safety clinics.

Pilot Program

AOE remains very grateful to the committee for including implementable language for this pilot program in Sec. 7 of Draft 5.1.

The details of the pilot program need to be worked out, so the committee can expect a more detailed update at the start of next session. That said, we are looking at the following elements as a starting point for our planning:

- The pilot program would provide regional driver education clinics where students could get the six hours of on the road instruction.
- Students from multiple participating districts and schools would participate in the regional clinic, held over the weekend or a summer.
- The location of clinics, from what geographic area and what participating schools they are drawn from, and other details are all to be determined.
- The AOE and DMV will recruit interested districts to partner on the pilot program. The number of clinics offered as part of the pilot is to be determined based on interest and location of the school districts.

As this is a pilot, we will not be able to implement the whole program for the entire state.

Additional Requested Edit to Draft 5.1 Language

As part of preparation for this testimony, AOE identified one additional change that will be needed in order to implement the pilot program.

Current State Board of Education rule in [Series 2300](#) reads:

2352. To be approved by the Department of Education, a driver education course must consist of at least 30 clock-hours of class instruction and at least 6 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction by a certified driver education instructor. No more than 2 hours of classroom instruction, and 1 hour of behind-the-wheel instruction shall be provided to a student in one day.

This one (1) hour per day requirement needs to be waived. It is likely that we may structure the pilot in such a way that students receive more than one hour of driver instruction per day, with the goal of structuring the regional clinics in a time efficient way.

Accordingly, we request that the committee include language waiving this SBE rule for the purposes of this pilot program only.