



To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Jay Nichols , Executive Director

Date: February 16, 2024

Subject: **S. 203 - An act relating to the appointment of State Board of Education members**

For the record, Jay Nichols, Executive Director the Vermont Principals' Association.

First, I'd like to thank Senators Gulick, Baruth, Hashim, and Perchlik for their clear understanding, as evidenced by this bill to address the composition of the State Board of Education, in recognizing that our current state board composition and construct should be updated.

We support the composition of 10 members *“of which expertise or experience as a principal, superintendent, teacher, school board member, educator preparation program provider, special education provider, and parent shall be represented by at least one member each.”* We are also supportive of the 2 student member language; however, we would like to make it clear that roughly 95% of students served in Vermont schools are served by public schools. Thus, we hope the Governor will give that due consideration when he is appointing student members to the State Board of Education.

We also support four members being appointed by the Governor, three selected from the Senate's Committee on Committees and three members chosen by the speaker. We fully support that this illustrious committee and their sister committee in the House will provide six or more candidates to the choosing authority (either the Committee on Committees or the Speaker). Additionally, when an opening in the State Board arises prior to a Board member fulfilling their term of office, we concur that the *“appointing authority that made the initial appointment of the expired term,”* fill that opening.

We don't have any comments or concerns really with how to fill terms expired by current members of the State Board. We are also supportive of the bill becoming law on Jul 1, 2024 .

Let me briefly share comments for the consideration of Senate Education members, and all members of the General Assembly really, that are related but not directly germane to the main points of this bill. Under our current construct, the State Board of Education is essentially rudderless and the Agency of Education does not work with them in the close symbiotic relationship that is necessary to provide coherence and the effective Direction, Alignment, and Commitment that needs to be at the forefront of education policy in Vermont. I believe our experiment with a Secretary of Education who reports directly to the Governor has been a failed experiment and I think it is time to go back to a Commissioner who reports to the State Board. I would be glad to discuss this concept in as great of detail and duration as necessary for anyone who would listen. Suffice to say that not having a Secretary of Education for almost a year is a very bad look for our education system and points to the folly of the current process. The position is now a political position in which the Secretary simply does the bidding of the governor whether or not that is best for the education system. We need a system in which the education system itself has a Department of Education (not an Agency) that is in service of education and reports directly to a Commissioner who is answerable to a State Board that is representative of the entire K-12 education system.