



Testimony to Senate Education - Tuesday, January 10, 2023 - 2:30 p.m.

Jeff Francis, Executive Director  
Chelsea Myers, Associate Executive Director

## **Brief Overview of the Association**

### Our Vision and Mission

The Vermont Superintendents Association works to ensure that Vermont public education supports each and every student in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for success in a rapidly changing world. To achieve that result, the Association:

- Promotes improvements to laws, regulations and practices.
- Engages partners to support a framework for transforming public education to meet the needs of 21st century learners.
- Supports superintendents through transparent, proactive analysis and communications specific to educational issues at the local, state, and federal level.
- Supports superintendents through high quality professional development and direct support within the districts they serve.

### Membership Composition

- 55 superintendents
- 8 assistant superintendents
- 10 professional affiliates

### Leadership and Organization

- 10 Member Board of Trustees comprising 4 officers, 5 regional representatives and the past-president
  - Peter Burrows, Addison Central School District, President
  - Amy Minor, Colchester School District, President-Elect
  - Julie Regimbal, Missisquoi Valley School District, Secretary
  - Lynn Cota, Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union, Treasurer
  - Michael Clark, Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Champlain Region
  - Jennifer Botzojorns, Kingdom East School District, Northeast Region
  - Sherry Sousa, Windsor Central Supervisory Union, Southeast Region
  - Brooke Olsen-Farrell, Slate Valley School District, Southwest Region
  - David Younce, Past-President

- Organized in 5 regional groups that historically have met monthly on operational, policy and organizational business - far more frequently through the pandemic

#### Staff

- Executive Director: Jeffrey Francis
- Associate Executive Director: Chelsea Myers
- Office Manager: Kristi Tate

In general the work of the Association falls into three areas:

- Support for members (from staff and colleagues)
- Engaging in the education policy arena
- Providing professional learning opportunities for superintendents, central office administrators and education leaders interested in the superintendency

Most recently our areas of focus have been:

- Supporting superintendents and school districts in state initiatives such as Act 173 implementation; PCB sampling; preparation to the field for implementation of the proposed changes to the Education Quality Standards under Act 1; monitoring the development of school district quality standards under Act 127
- Emphasizing equity and inclusion through programs of the Association and partnerships with other organizations
- Conducting a robust professional learning program focused on best practices in school leadership, leadership development and inclusive education.

Three Priority Areas for 2023/2024/2025

- Facilities
- Worker Shortage
- Mental Health

Our specific testimony today is focused on superintendent responses to the prompt:

"From the perspective of superintendents, how are things going with public education in Vermont?"

To prepare we solicited responses to that question from VSA's Board of Trustees at their regular monthly meeting last Friday. They provided "in the moment" responses which I distilled into the following themes:

- Educators, generally, are unflappable in their commitment to children and their learning and growth processes. Teachers and all educators are working tirelessly.
- Worker shortages are problematic with varying effects across systems. Some superintendents observe some greater interest on the part of local residents in joining the workforce in school systems - which is helpful, but will not resolve issues arising from worker shortages overall.
- Despite their commitment, the tremendous demands on educators and the educational system are contributing to employee and system fatigue.

- Technology is being increasingly relied on and has been effective in supporting the learning process.
- Persistent pressures brought about by enactment and implementation of new or expanded initiatives by the General Assembly and the Agency add to the stress being experienced in the field.
- The stakes and pressures in the field are greater than they are in other entities (General Assembly and Agency) within the public education ecosystem. The General Assembly and the Agency of Education bear responsibility for establishing specific requirements, processes and initiatives within the education delivery system, whereas the local education system bears responsibility for fulfilling those requirements, processes and initiatives in total. The buck stops with the local education system.
- The condition of facilities (learning environments) is substandard in many cases and deteriorating. This has superintendents and others wondering when there will be a systematic, sustained and sufficient effort to address those challenges. Working in challenging conditions brought about by the pandemic and related factors, has exacerbated the challenges associated with working in sub-standard physical environments - or vice versa.
- In spite of the magnitude of current challenges, local stakeholder demands for more from our school systems have persisted, and in some cases, increased. These pressures have the effect of creating greater demands on all facets of the local school system overall - thereby exacerbating current challenging conditions.
- Challenges associated with student behaviors and mental health workers are continuing at levels noticeably higher than pre-pandemic. A breakdown in services provided by the designated mental health agencies is problematic in that outside resources are not available to support children needing these services. Long wait times, or no service availability at all are common-place observations by school administrators and are having real consequences for students and school systems .
- Superintendents are concerned about mounting fiscal pressures, with general inflation, worker shortages, funding cliffs created by the loss of federal ESSER funds, increasing student needs and needs for facilities investments. New or expanding requirements and initiatives exacerbate this situation.
- Challenges associated with declining enrollment, worker shortages, poverty, seem even more problematic in the more rural areas.

The themes that are outlined above, relate directly to the second prompt, “which is what can the General Assembly do to help?”

The most obvious response to that question seems to be, please be extremely discerning in your consideration of new legislation that could contribute to the significant pressures on educators, school systems and learners currently.

That is not to say that the General Assembly should refrain from passing legislation that will help alleviate the conditions indicated above. On the contrary, we look forward to working with you in those efforts.

An important area of focus will be efforts to improve the learning experiences of students by collaborating as systems thinkers and understanding how legislation intersects the the entities

performing the work, and making informed decisions together in order to be sure that new legislation builds toward greater coherence for the system overall.

To that end, we pledge, on behalf of the Association, to provide information and arrange for superintendents to inform your work in support of public education during the 2023/2024 biennium.

Thank you.