

Dr. Rob Schulze

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Testimony to Senate Committee on Education

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Hello. My name is Dr. Rob Schulze, and I am the professor of special education at Northern Vermont University Johnson, soon to become the Johnson campus of Vermont State University. I am pleased to speak on behalf of Vermont State in regard to undergraduate education at the University and the programs we offer.

As a refresher, this coming summer four former state colleges – Johnson in Lamoille County, Castleton in Rutland County, Lyndon in Caledonia County, and Vermont Tech which has multiple locations but which has its main campus in Orange County – are combining into one institution, Vermont State University. As part of this unification, the undergraduate education programs - which previously were completely separate, with different courses of study and ROPA approvals - have combined into one unified department with one program of study. I am excited to tell you about the different education programs which will be offered to the future students of Vermont and what it means for our workforce moving forward.

Firstly, at the elementary or K to 6 level, Vermont State University is not doing separate elementary and special education training programs, but rather one inclusive childhood education degree, where all students graduate with both regular and special education endorsements. This is a program which has existed at the Johnson and Lyndon campus to great success, and which is being adopted across the VTSU. Whereas in many teacher education programs special education is an optional credential, or an add on to an education program, at VTSU it is a core component of the education that all elementary education students receive. Our courses integrate special education and regular education content, preparing students to teach all students. In the senior year, the students do a full-

year in public schools, with time divided among regular and special education to get them hands-on experience in both areas. In this way everyone benefits – our graduate will be better teachers who have double the available job opportunities, and with special education being an area of dire shortage in the state, the pool of qualified candidates for those positions is increased.

In addition, in a brand new program which has been designed to begin next year with the launch of the VTSU, we will also be introducing a complementary program in Inclusive Adolescent Education for teachers who are looking for endorsement at the high school level. This program is similar in that it integrates the special education content with the secondary instruction to prepare teachers to work with all students in their content area, which is sorely needed in Vermont schools. Due to the larger course needs of majoring in a content area (for instance, biology or mathematics) in addition to the education program these students do not receive a special education endorsement upon their undergraduate graduation. However, the program allows them to take six graduate credits after graduation to earn that endorsement, creating a clear path to adding more special educators and to steering our teachers towards additional professional education when they are in the field. We are very excited to launch this program at Vermont State.

Finally, aside from elementary, secondary, and special education, Vermont State University will offer endorsement in other areas of need. One is what we refer to as the Unified Arts. These are the teachers for such specialty fields as physical education and art. These programs will not be offered at all campuses but rather specialized to the expertise of the faculty at the different campuses; for instance, physical education and music will only be at Castleton, while theater arts will only be at Johnson. Relatedly, the Vermont Tech programs for industrial arts and other career and technical education programs will continue their good work. Also, the highly successful early childhood education programs for teachers of students younger than K-12 school age will continue to serve that population, both in public preschool programs and in private practice.

I feel very entitled to speak for all the education faculty at the state colleges when I say that we are excited about what this unification and our programs mean for both our students and the state. Our data shows that the majority of teachers in our programs are from Vermont and stay in Vermont, and we in the state college system have a great deal of influence on how our schools will perform going forward. We take this responsibility very seriously and will continue to graduate the best teachers to serve the state of Vermont.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer questions.