



From: Jay Nichols , Executive Director

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Subject: Vermont Principals' Association Legislative Priorities

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

The Vermont Principals' Association has just under 800 members. These members are mostly principals, assistant principals, and high school athletic directors; however, many superintendents, curriculum coordinators, and special education administrators are also members of the VPA. I'm sure I have forgotten some priorities of our members but below is what leaders in the field and our Executive Council are most focused on. Our priorities for the current legislative session are as follows but not in any prioritized order:

- Providing public pre K full school day full school year (optional for parents) for at least all Vermont four year olds.
 - A good step in the right direction this legislative session would be to provide pre k funding for programs with licensed teachers with funding weights equal to grades K-5 at the very least
 - The Agency of Education recently recommended this weighting change as a good starting place. Here is that link:
 - <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/edu-legislative-report-Act-76-pupil-weights-2023-1.pdf>
 - And here are two further articles once again demonstrating how important full day high quality (meaning licensed teacher) Pre-K programs are
 - ["40 Years After a Nation at Risk: The Imperative for High -Quality Pre-K"](#)
 - [A new study shows how school can maximize full day pre K's benefit.](#)
- School Construction funding - the cost of deferred maintenance is only increasing. Any funding toward school construction must be considered in the context of school infrastructure statewide; we must be careful to not spend good money after bad. There will be some very tough decisions to make about school buildings that will need legislative and administration leadership. I've

attached the last big national report that I could find that simply speaks to costs of Maintenance and Operations to say nothing about needed construction

- <https://facilitiesmanagementadvisor.blr.com/maintenance-and-operations/report-u-s-public-school-facilities-face-staggering-annual-funding-gap/>
- PCB Funding. This is a public health issue and mitigation funds should NOT come from the Education fund further driving up property taxes and putting additional strains on school district budgets. It should also not be left to school leaders to figure out. High levels of support from the State is crucial to any work in this area. Educators are not PCB mitigation experts and school boards cannot serve as fundraisers to appeal to communities for financial resources to mitigate PCB's. Many of my members have asked the question, why is Vermont embarking on this PCB mitigation in schools path when no other states have taken this step and when we have so many other pressing issues and financial concerns? We are not going to argue against the science; however, at least my members would like to stop being the first state to take on things that are so complicated, expensive, and have such impact on the functionality of schools on a day-to-day basis. It would be OK to let other states figure out some of this stuff first; going first is breaking new territory and breaking new territory is expensive and complex and not always necessary
 - <https://www.wcax.com/2023/03/02/look-inside-vermonts-unprecedented-school-pcb-testing-program/>
- Mental Health supports for students. We support any legislation that provides children in Vermont with the mental health services they need. Our mental health infrastructure appears to be broken. Kids are coming to school with unmet needs and school staff are spending increasing amounts of human and financial resources just to triage issues for which our employees are not trained. Metaphorically, we are putting bandaids on situations that need real professional medical attention. Later today you will hear from school leaders on the work they have done to create what we are calling Community Schools. Much of this work, and thousands of other examples across the state, relate directly to the mental health crisis in our state and the void of services that families and children need to survive that are continually being picked up by schools.
- We should stop spending taxpayer dollars on schools that discriminate against some of our Vermont children. We, as a state, took no action thus far in the wake of the Carson V. Makin Supreme Court decision and now we are providing taxpayer dollars to schools that openly discriminate against some of our students. One major ongoing VPA goal is to *Uphold the public mission of schools to provide equitable learning opportunities for all Vermont students*. We are falling short on this pledge for some Vermont children. Please don't pass any new legislation that allows some schools to discriminate against Vermont children with immunity and please address the places that are already using public dollars and who already discriminate against some of our children.
- Banning flavored vaping products in Vermont - including menthol.
 - These are targeted toward kids, they promote addiction and they serve no useful purpose other than to hook another generation so that tobacco companies can continue to make profits

- We can say kids legally can't have these products; but they are prevalent in our schools. Kids are getting them from somewhere and they are ending up at school and they are hooking another generation on nicotine
 - ☐ Vaping Products
- Take a hard look at the effectiveness of the Agency of Education and the State Board of Education in the current educational framework and determine whether or not some high level significant structural changes should occur. The voices from the field overall, at least from school leaders, are pretty dissatisfied with the AOE and the State Board in general, you heard today for example how under resourced the State Board has been- however, I want to say publicly that there are certain AOE employees that are consistently praised by school leaders for their expertise, professionalism, and general supportive nature and we know State Board members are essentially volunteers.
- *Provide resources/learning to school leaders to foster resilience within school communities* is a major VPA goal. The directly increased pressures on the Education Fund and that ultimately taxpayers and school districts have little or no control over have created a perfect storm. ESSER Ending; 16.5% Health Care increase; increased employee pay to keep up with the job market needs; educational funding change re. pupil weighting; increases in all contracted services as it becomes harder to hire employees; rising values of Vermont homes as determined by Common Level of Appraisal have created a context in which communities may have to make some very tough decisions and some of those decisions will negatively impact our most vulnerable children and communities.
- *"Support, retain, and recruit school leaders with a focus on increasing diversity,"* is an ongoing goal that we have. We, like the rest of the nation, are struggling to support and retain our leaders. If we want to achieve the great schools that our children deserve, we need to take away administrivia and unfunded mandates from our school leaders and allow them to actually do the job they trained for (e.g. of factors getting in the way of leaders staying in the field: Burdensome HHB investigative procedures, cumbersome evaluation systems, less pay per diem than many of their teachers with a job that has a lot more responsibility and for which you are never really "off" and I could go on ..."
- Anything to help with the dearth of qualified teachers and support staff to help school leaders fill positions that continue to be extremely hard to fill would be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted, Jay Nichols