

Essex North Supervisory Union

(Averill, Avery's Gore, Bloomfield, Brunswick, Canaan,
Lemington, Lewis, Norton, Warner's Grant and Warren's
Gore)

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House Education Committee Testimony

Thank you for the chance to speak to you today. My name is Chris Masson and I am superintendent of the Essex North Supervisory Union representing Bloomfield, Brunswick, Canaan, Lemington, Norton, and a number of unorganized Towns and Gores.

Today, I am going to ask you to reconsider the perception that Vermont dollars are for Vermont residents and Vermont institutions. I believe that this way of thinking may be overly provincial and, short-sighted; it is certainly to the detriment of our students. As examples, I would like to discuss the High School Completion and Dual Enrollment Programs.

First, I would like to say that High School Completion is an excellent program and has had a major impact in reducing the drop-out rate at Canaan Schools. But, our issue is that New Hampshire students attending Canaan Schools do not have equal access to High School Completion.

This is not fair, and makes little fiscal sense. In FY15, Canaan's expenditure budget is projected to be offset by \$400,000 or 10.8% thanks to high school tuition from New Hampshire students. This is \$400,000 of local revenue that is not being required from the Education Fund. If these students chose to attend high school in New Hampshire, Canaan would be required to either cut programs or find the money elsewhere. Through their tuition payments, these students should receive identical service as a student who resides in Vermont. When these kids enter Canaan Schools we consider them our students, and they are, they are Canaan's students, and they are Vermont's students.

Canaan has the same issues with the Dual Enrollment Program. Our tuition students from New Hampshire should be able to access the same vouchers as their Vermont resident peers. In addition, schools such as Canaan Schools that are located in towns along the borders of other states, should be able to utilize dual enrollment opportunities in out-of-state colleges and universities. Canaan has a well-established relationship with the White Mountain Community College and its' Running Start program. Annually, many of our seniors graduate with a semester or more of earned college credits.

But, the way the law is currently written, Canaan would have to disband our current program and move all dual enrollment activities to CCV and the Vermont State College system. Education funds should be spent educating students of Vermont schools. Where the post-secondary institution is located should be irrelevant. If non-operating districts are allowed to pay tuition to approved out-of-state schools, then how is this situation any different? It is not; vouchers for dual enrollment should be able to be used in outside the Vermont State College system.

I respectfully request that the definition of a “Vermont student” be changed to include both resident and tuition paying students.

My last item involves the Personalized Learning Plan legislation. This legislation is great for students and families, but it does not go far enough. The problem is that there is no expectation or plan for a statewide system that coordinates and houses these plans. Again, Vermont schools are given advice, counseling, and options when what they need are more concrete requirements. I was a member of the PLP work group and believe that we did the best we could with what we were charged to do. But, if PLPs are left to the individual schools to create and implement there will never be state-wide fidelity. Think of Vermont’s high rate of turn-over of principals and other administrators. Each time one of these positions is vacated, many of the programs and initiatives he or she may have instituted falls through the cracks. The same will happen to PLPs. In this modern age, where banking, travel arrangements, and many of other functions of daily life are web-based, so should be Vermont’s students PLPs. They should be electronic and in a consistent format statewide. In this way, this awesome opportunity will not be lost. If Personalized Learning Plans are important, and I believe they are, then the State needs to find a way to fund their proper implementation.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate the work that you do.

Respectfully,

Christopher R. Masson
Superintendent, ENSU

CC: Canaan School Board