

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

House Committee on Education

- Guest: Dr. Michael R. Dewese, Retired Superintendent

**Summary Presentation: Opportunity to Learn: Defining Vermont Education for a New Generation of Learners (policy recommendation V: "Formation of Regional Education Districts")<sup>1</sup>**

**Context:** The Education Transformation Policy Commission worked in service to the Vermont State Board of Education. The Commission's final report was submitted in December, 2009. (The Commission's working period was from March through December, 2009.)

The Education Transformation Policy Commission's membership with (then) current affiliations:

- Donald Collins (*Member, State Board of Education*)
- Mike Dewese (*Superintendent, Chittenden Central SU*)
- Johannah Donovan (*Chair, House Education Committee*)
- Retta Dunlap (*Parent and Education Advocate*)
- Terri Geney (*Parent and Local PTA President*)
- Brian Howe (*Teacher; VT Professional Standards Board*)
- Tom James (*Former Chair, State Board of Education*)
- Christopher Koliba (*Director, Master of Public Administration, UVM*)
- William Rivard (*Principal, North County Union High School*)
- Chris Robbins (*Business Representative; State Board of Education*)
- William Romand (*Former Teacher and Former Deputy Commissioner*)
- Laura Soares (*Parent and Local School Board Member*)
- Martha Tucker (*Superintendent, Caledonia Central SU*)
- Kyle Weinreich (*Student, Twinfield High School*)
- Karrin Wilks (*Senior Vice President, Vermont State Colleges*)

Quotable: "Our children's futures are not our past!"<sup>2</sup>

Quotable: "Our recommendations are interdependent and should be approached as a comprehensive whole, though we divided them into five sections."<sup>3</sup>

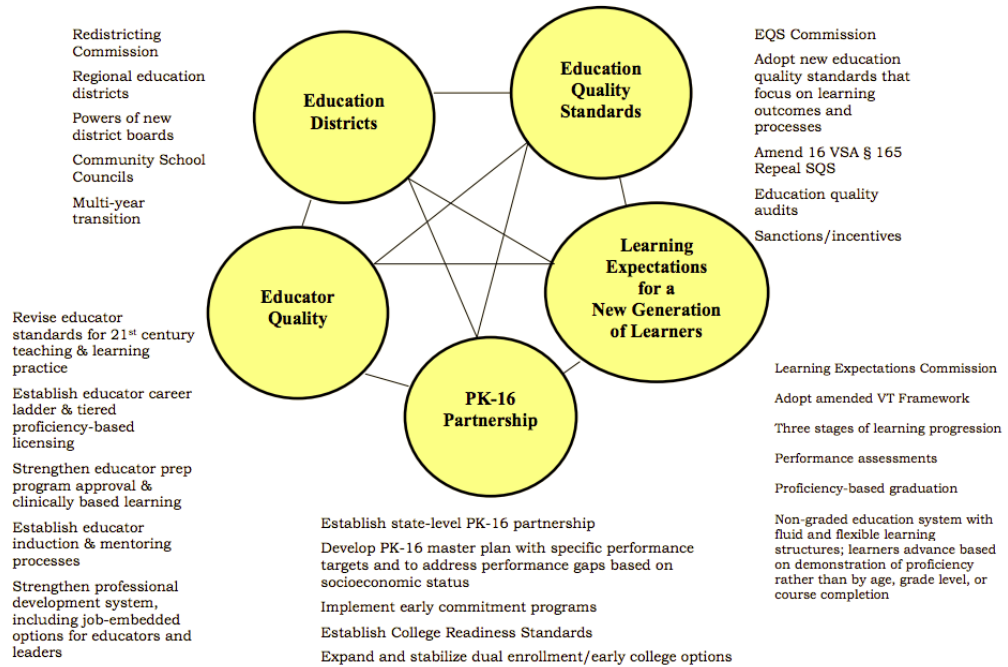
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<sup>1</sup> Full document available at [http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-EQSC\\_Opportunity\\_to\\_Learn.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-EQSC_Opportunity_to_Learn.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Opportunity to Learn, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.6.

## Overview of Recommended Policy Actions



### **Commission's Principles and Values:**

- Focus on learner outcomes
- Respect for learners
- Simplicity and coherence
- Flexibility
- Partnership
- Educator Support
- Accountability
- College Readiness

**Purpose of forming Education Districts:** *To expand capacity, variety, and quality of learning opportunities within each district responsive to the changing needs and interests of a new generation of learners.*

Quotable: "Issues of governance within the education sector can have a profound impact on access to and the quality of education." [Eklund, 2009]<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 56

**Rationale for a redesign of educational units**

- For current and future generations of learners to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a global and technological world and develop their individual talents ...
- Limiting education to the town of residence is an anachronism.
- Larger districts offer learners’ access to multiple schools, learning opportunities beyond schools, distance and on-line learning, and post-secondary options.
- Larger districts can more meaningfully engage learners and their families in their education planning.
- Larger districts can more meaningfully tailor learning opportunities.
- Larger districts can specialize, refine (and jettison) services.

Quotable: "...we not only accept the limitation of town residence on PK-12 educational opportunity, many seem to even prefer we impose this limitation on our students."<sup>5</sup>

Two significant Vermont barriers today:

- 16 VSA §421(a): “A town shall constitute a school district ...”
- Construct of supervisory unions

The table below compares the magnitude of Vermont’s district structure to other selected states:

State	# of Students	# of School Districts	Ave. Students Per District
Vermont	90,504	290	312
Maine	193,986	287	676
New Hampshire	203,498	183	1,112
Wyoming	85,034	52	1,635
Massachusetts	943,728	328	2,877
New York	2,757,907	697	3,957
Rhode Island	136,940	32	4,279
Delaware	114,678	19	6,036
Maryland	851,640	24	35,485

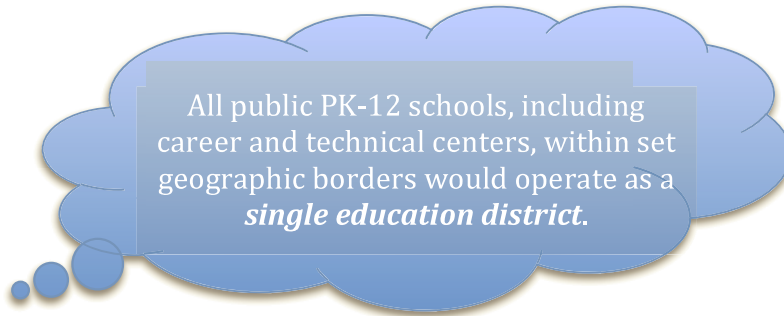
Notes: Vermont has the lowest average students per district in the country. Moreover, Vermont’s average of 312 students per district is less than 10 percent of the national average of 3,382. It is also less than 10% of the national median of 3,398. [Data from National Center for Education Statistics for school year 2006-2007.]

Quotable: “The fundamental purpose of education districts is to consolidate educational resources and expand learner and family access to these resources to enhance their learning options.”

“The Commission believes that a regional district governance system will provide better opportunities for Vermont children to learn.”

“The Commission does not promote the change to larger districts as a method to greatly reduce costs or administrative positions. It will not accomplish either.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 57  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 59



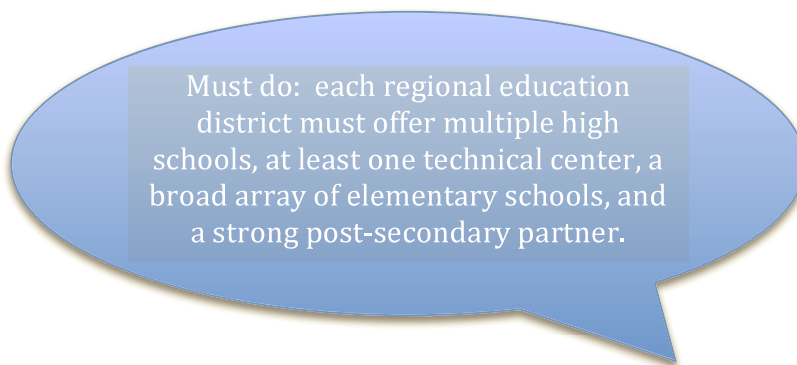
Quotable: "The status quo of 290 school districts in our small state does not serve students well. The Commission recommends fewer and larger districts."<sup>7</sup>

A consideration: form a "Redistricting Commission" to conduct hearings, do further research, and bring final recommendations forward.

### **Regional Education Districts**

Four variables inherent in the formation of Education Districts:

1. Amend 16 VSA §421(a)
2. Determine membership and powers of education district boards
3. Determine membership and powers of community school councils
4. Plan for the development and transition process for implementing education district



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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 60

Two approaches to establishing regional education districts:

Amend VSA 16 §421(a) (by listing education districts with district listing of member towns)

- OR -

Repeal VSA 16 §421(a) and expand statutory powers of the State Board of Education to establish education districts.

### **Regional Education District Boards**

- Will require repealing:
  - 16 VSA §423 & §563 (membership and power of school boards)
  - 16 VSA §261a & §266 (duties and membership of supervisory union boards)
- Will require adopting:
  - Definition of membership and powers of newly constituted Education District boards

Commission Recommendations on Boards:

- Membership of each Education District board
  - Not less than seven nor more than eleven members
  - Membership apportioned on most recent (and successive decennial) Federal Census (combined population)
  - See report (p. 63) for suggested formula in identifying board seats
- Powers
  - Reframe 16 VSA §563
  - The District Board shall
    - Establish goals
    - Establish policy environment
    - Establish assessment and accountability schema
    - Conduct business in ethical, fair, respectful, and responsible manners
    - Education advocacy
    - Employ a Superintendent to serve as Chief Executive Officer and delegate all operational decision (with law, regulations, policy, etc.).
    - Ensure, through its superintendent, compliance with all applicable federal and Vermont laws, rules, regs, et al.

### **Membership and Powers of Community School Councils**

- Schoolhouse-based Council
- Advise the principal on school-based interests
- Help shape the school environment and implementation of vision and policies of the Board
- Each Council shall have not less than 5 nor more than eight members
- Broad stakeholder membership (staff, students, parents, community members)
- Duties and powers:
  - Advise the principal on education performance issues, including proposing a budget and plan for desired educational services at the school
  - Communicate with learners and families and solicit local input on the school could better serve students
  - Advise on continuous school improvement
  - Engage the community as active contributors to school for enhanced learning opportunities

## **Development and Transition Process**

- Several years
  - Transfer of assets & liabilities
  - Educating learners and families about newly expanded roles and opportunities
  - Resolving transportation issues
  - Determining how best to organize the district's learning options
  - Building post-secondary relationship(s)
  - Adopting personnel policies
  - Establish pay equity discrepancies
  - Resolve labor and employment issues and structure collective bargaining directions
  - Ensuring equitable educational access across the district
  - Strengthening and coordinating professional development for educators
- Needed state supports
  - Legal counsel
  - Draft policies
  - Guidance on transition details
  - Time sensitive benchmarks

The “end game” ... a phased process that merges existing districts and supervisory unions into regional education districts to expand the capacity, variety, and quality of learning opportunities responsive to the changing needs and interests of Vermont's new generation of learners.

- end -